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BUILDING GROUP

Natasha Jurakhan and Peter Sitarz founded Starna Building Group in late 2018 on the conviction that construction management works best at a scale where the partners never leave the project.



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Natasha Jurakhan and Peter Sitarz founded Starna Building Group in late 2018. *The reason was a conviction about what custom home building actually is. "You're not just dealing with construction," Jurakhan says. "You're dealing with people's personal and most intimate spaces, which is their homes." That, in her view, demands a level of attention and client care she felt the market was not consistently delivering.*

The answer was a firm built deliberately boutique: small enough that both partners personally manage every project and every client relationship, from first consultation through handover and beyond. Both partners brought extensive backgrounds in high-end custom home construction, supported by combined experience in construction management, commercial projects, and architectural technology. In the firm's establishing years they took the work available, ground-floor renovations and additions, scaling their new-build expertise to smaller projects until the new construction opportunities followed. Today Starna operates as a full-service construction management firm, with a project mix spanning complex renovations, additions, and ground-up custom homes across the Greater Toronto Area, alongside commercial construction management work.





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THE FOUNDERS' BACKGROUNDS

Before Starna, Jurakhan worked in Washington, DC as a facility management consultant, advising major cultural and government institutions on the operations and maintenance of their facilities, experience grounded in the institutional, commercial, and industrial world. She holds both the Facility Management Professional (FMP) and LEED AP designations. Sitarz brings the complementary half: a background in architectural technology and years of hands-on construction leadership in the field. It is an unusual depth of pedigree for a boutique firm, and it shapes the work in a specific way: Starna builds with the entire life of a building in mind, not just its completion date.

That means the maintenance burden of every product and detail is considered during tendering, not discovered after possession. Some clients are happy to maintain elements of their home seasonally; others want as little upkeep as the physics of a house allows. Jurakhan's team surfaces those trade-offs up front, recommending longer-lasting alternates where they fit, so the home a client receives matches not only how they want to live in it but how they want to care for it.





CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT, END TO END

Starna's service scope runs the full arc of construction management: preconstruction planning, procurement, budgeting, scheduling, project coordination, and construction oversight. Ask Jurakhan where a project succeeds or fails and the answer is unambiguous: before a shovel touches the ground. Starna encourages clients to engage the builder at the very beginning of the process, before design is established. The alternative, being retained after design is complete, too often produces a budget that exceeds expectations, followed by value engineering, reselection, and redesign, a cycle that burns consultant time and calendar in equal measure.

Engaged early, Starna works alongside the architect, designer, and consultant team to set project goals so the design aligns with the client's budget from the first drawing. Pre-construction proceeds through periodic team meetings on details, site logistics, and execution, with incremental budget updates as the design matures.

By permit drawings, the budget typically holds within a ten percent variance pending finishes and site conditions, and the issued-for-construction set becomes, in Jurakhan's words, the bible for the build. The phase also covers subcontractor conversations, tendering for startup trades, and the scheduling groundwork that lets the site team hit the ground running. "The longer you have to plan the project, the easier it is for us to execute on site," she says.





RENOVATION AND THE DISCIPLINE OF TROUBLESHOOTING

Jurakhan is careful not to undersell new construction, building on Toronto's tight urban lots involves shoring details and engineering that carry real complexity. But renovation, particularly of the city's older housing stock, is a different discipline. Homes dating to the 1800s were built under standards far more lax than today's codes, and opening their walls reveals the evidence: holes drilled through joists, insufficient insulation, structural deficiencies that no professional builder can close back up unaddressed.

Tying new work into existing structure demands building science, troubleshooting, and close collaboration with engineers and architects, and sometimes it demands a builder's alternative to a detail that would be prohibitively expensive as first drawn. It also demands something outside the technical entirely: managing the client through it. Discoveries cost time and money, and Starna treats educating the client through those moments, honestly and as a team, as part of the technical work itself. It is, Jurakhan notes, precisely the kind of complexity some builders prefer to avoid.



DIVIDING THE WORK

The partnership divides cleanly. Jurakhan runs operations: project managers, coordinators, administrators, and the project accountant report to her. Sitarz, as director of construction, spends his days on site, managing supervisors and trades for quality and schedule. Estimating is shared ground, both partners prepare budgets, negotiate with trades, and award contracts.
The rhythm of the firm is a weekly project team meeting with the schedule on the wall and the site supervisor, project manager, and coordinator in the room, walking the budget and timeline in real time and resolving deviations as a group rather than by memo.

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THE MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Starna's most distinctive offering was never planned as a business line. As the firm's completed homes aged, clients kept calling, for filter changes, seasonal shutdowns, hose bibs, the accumulating small needs of a well-built house, and a quarterly maintenance program for Starna-built homes grew organically out of answering them. It has since become a revenue stream, but its logic is architectural rather than commercial. “Nobody knows your house better than your builder,” Jurakhan says.

Starna knows what is behind every wall it has closed, holds the documentation, and knows where the radiant heating lines run before anyone drills a floor.
The program is also the clearest expression of what clients say distinguishes the firm: it does not leave. Relationships with clients routinely outlast the build itself, which Jurakhan takes as its own form of evidence. “They like us, which is also a good indicator that we did a good job.”

SUSTAINABILITY IN PRACTICE

Jurakhan holds a LEED AP designation, and Starna applies sustainable products and systems where clients ask for them, a choice that carries real cost and is therefore left to the client.

Where the firm exercises sustainability unilaterally is in its own conduct: reusing materials, ordering to need, returning surplus, and separating waste for disposal, discipline that costs the client nothing and is applied on every project regardless of mandate.

CLIENT EDUCATION AND THE FINAL STRETCH

Starna knows both sides of a divide here. The partners’ commercial construction management experience makes consultant teams, architects, and business clients familiar ground; custom residential, by contrast, is usually a client’s first build. Starna treats closing that knowledge gap as core scope. Millwork, to take Jurakhan's own example, is among the longest lead items in any home: shop drawings, review, approval, ten to sixteen weeks of fabrication depending on the shop, then installation, and only then can countertops be measured and their own shop drawing cycle begin.

Every element carries interdependencies like these, and Starna walks clients through them so the sequence on site makes sense rather than mystifies. Then there is the end. “The last ten percent is the hardest percent of any build,” Jurakhan says: the client is exhausted and wants their house, and it is exactly the moment some builders check out. Starna's answer is *all hands on deck*, both partners included, on site through the finish. “If we have to push a broom, we'll push a broom.”





THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Jurakhan frames the future as deliberate growth rather than expansion for its own sake. She and Sitarz set out to build a boutique firm and intend to keep its defining qualities, personal involvement, quality, and attention to detail, intact as the business develops. The ambition runs toward the caliber and complexity of projects, and the possibilities include a satellite presence in Ontario's cottage country, where building activity is strong. What will not change is the model: projects are never handed off to someone with limited involvement, and growth never comes at the cost of the partners' presence on every job.

"You're only as good as the people that work for you," she says, and she credits the firm's team as the other half of the model, a happy team making happy clients. The promise Starna sells has not changed since 2018, and Jurakhan states it plainly: "We're here to build your home and you're going to love it, and we're not leaving you." At the firm's chosen scale, that is not a slogan. It is a standard the company is built to keep, and it is the whole point.

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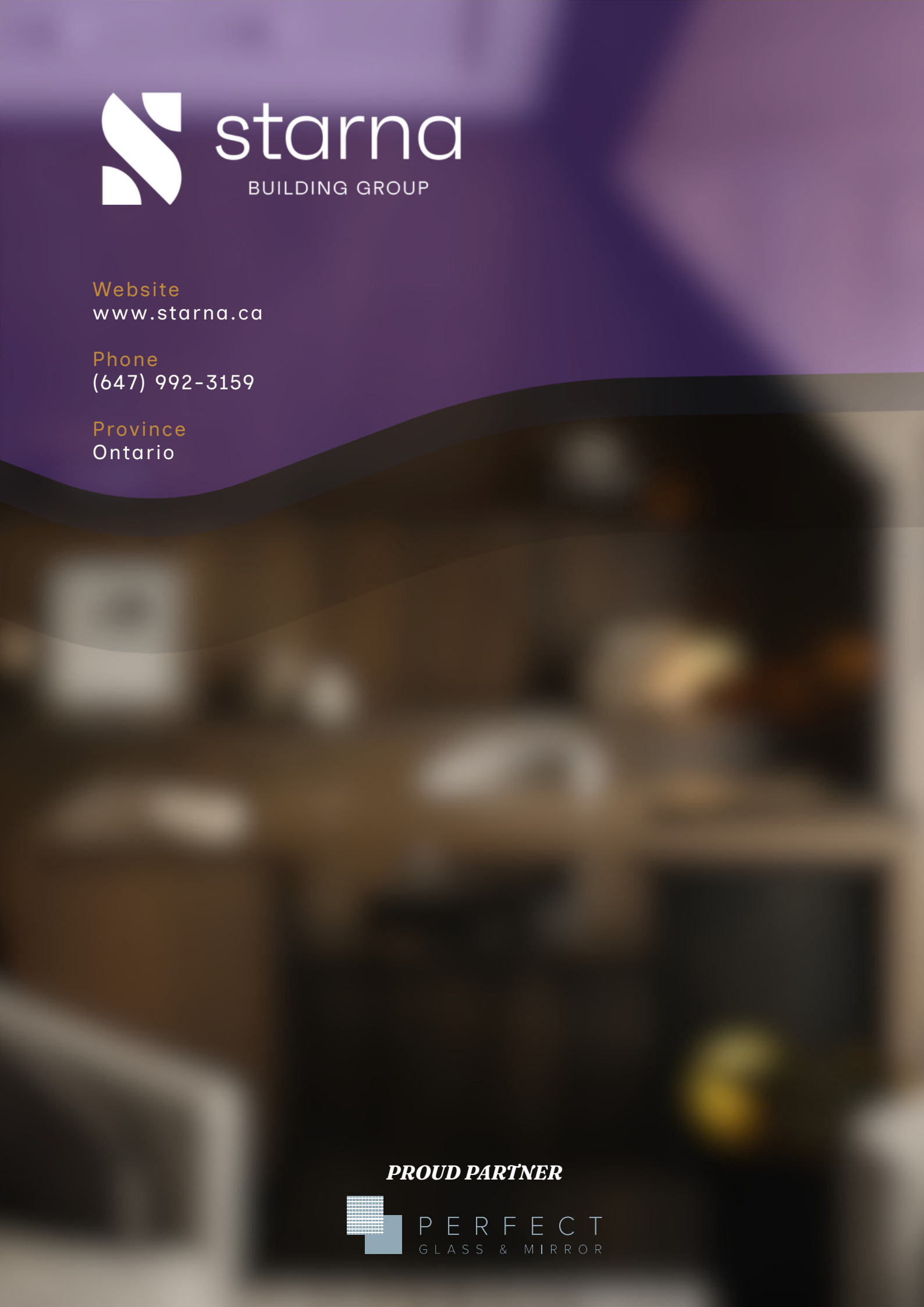


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