

BUILDING WOMEN STRONG

If you were to assume the Cape Cod building industry is exclusively made-up of strong, able-bodied men who are responsible for imagining, building, and maintaining the varied collection of homes across the region—you would be wrong.

It was a typical Cape Cod day in March on the Outer Cape. The wind off the water felt as though ice molecules were side-by-side with moist saltwater-based droplets; the kind of brisk breeze that leaves your hair, your clothes and any other exposed surface just a bit damp and on the verge of freezing. A well-dressed man, in an executive looking automobile, pulled up to a jobsite for an impressive home in the early stages of construction. Nothing at first glance identified what the future held for this precious piece of seaside real estate—no white mailbox post with a hand-painted street address, no seashell driveway flanked by tailored landscape beds and a manicured lawn, no shingled structure with spiffy white trim and coordinated shutters to welcome a lucky family and all their visitors. Instead, clay-like sand native to the Cape covered the ground from lot line to lot line. Frozen, rutted tire tracks crisscrossed the ground as they led to a staging area filled with a seemingly disorganized organization of building materials and tools.

As the man strode across the site to the closest human who was bent over a section of framing, he called out in a raised voice to be heard over the pneumatic nail guns, “I’m looking for the man in charge!” The worker, Mackenzie Sisson, straightened, as a wisp of blond hair appeared between the hood of the heavy sweatshirt and baseball cap that struggled to keep the wind at bay, squinting with eyes as blue as the ocean beyond, and a beaming smile, turned and answered, “You found her.”

Aleks Mazzeo
Mazzeo Construction, LLC



PROJECT/ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

MACKENZIE SISSON SUPERVISOR/PROJECT MANAGER HOMES BY SISSON

Mackenzie Sisson represents the second generation of her family’s design-build business based in East Orleans. Having built a reputation on building high-end custom homes for the past 34 years, Mackenzie’s parents, Scott and Randi, built their business, like their high-quality homes, from the ground up. Now their daughter Mackenzie, who says she gets her work ethic and commitment to client satisfaction from her parents, has stepped up to take on the duties as project manager. Sisson says her journey to the job site took a few paths before settling back on the Cape. Receiving a degree in Exercise Science, subsequent career choices left her unfulfilled. “I knew in my heart I was a Cape Codder,” she explains. “So, coming back to the Cape, I got my Master’s in Education and tried that for a bit, but really, time spent around my parents’ business is where I felt most at home.” Responsibilities started with cleaning up the site throughout the day, and small tasks too menial for carpenters, but so critical to a well-functioning and productive crew. Ten years later, Sisson understands the value of starting on the bottom rung, and says every day brings new things to be learned and adopted. “All of our team members have been mentors to me at one time or another, whether it has been through explanation or example, I have worked with some of the best artisans and carpenters around.”

Sisson says her proudest accomplishments have evolved



Mackenzie Sisson

spends time thinking about. “For me, I came to building naturally through my interest in the creative process and working with my hands. That’s it,” she states. “In my experience, regardless of gender, entering into and advancing within the building industry requires acquisition of skills and knowledge. That journey is transformative no matter who you are.”

Miner cites a former boss as one of her greatest mentors. “When I was new to the craft of timber-framing, my boss at the time helped me hone my skills, and expected nothing less than my best as we restored antique frames together with the patience of a master framer and curiosity of a neophyte to this historic way of building,” she recalls. That commitment to excellence is what Miner brings to the table in her current role as an account manager at Mid-Cape Home Centers. Her days are spent interacting and consulting with contractors as well as their clients, providing a liaison between what the clients want, and what the contractor deems possible. Often it is Miner’s experience and product understanding that helps

with her career, “Ten years ago, it would have been siding my first house and lacing the corners correctly. Five years ago, it would have been mastering kitchen cabinetry. Today, it’s a special project where we took on remodeling a fire-damaged shell of a *house* and gave the owners back a *home*.” She also says confidence is one of the most important tools in her belt, and her natural physicality doesn’t hurt. “I have been second guessed when it comes to certain tasks, like a lumber or window delivery,” she explains. “I often get, ‘Do you have any guys here to unload?’ They don’t consider a woman as being capable of handling it; until I grab the first window or sheet of plywood off the truck.”

LINDA MINER ACCOUNT MANAGER MID-CAPE HOME CENTERS

Linda Miner has spent almost two decades in the construction industry, with a Construction Supervisor License (CSL) for 15 of those years. Miner says for her, the societal perception of this industry being a male exclusive profession isn’t something she



April Ducott and Linda Miner

When examining how life has unfolded as a woman in the industry, Schneeberger says it has little to do with male versus female, "I find we are all treated differently depending upon how we approach situations. Personally, I have never been afraid to ask questions and I find that has helped me to establish relationships of respect with both men and women." That willingness she acknowledges is also present in the next generation she sees entering the industry. "I feel the newest generation entering the work force is very open to learning from and helping each other. Inclusion is greater," she observes. Schneeberger's 25 years in the profession has afforded her an opportunity to regard her peers from a point of appreciation. "At the end of the day, after everyone has gone home, I often walk around the desks and see sketches of designs being worked out as well as pin-ups of inspirational materials and images," she shares. "I get such a charge seeing signs that everyone is so engaged and thinking so deeply about what they do."



Leslie Schneeberger



Katelyn Manfredo

KATELYN MANFREDO SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, ARCHITECT SV DESIGN

When she was in junior high, Katelyn Manfredo's parents designed and built their own home—laying the framework for her passion to become an architect. As she grew up living what her future clients would also experience through her own designs, Manfredo now approaches each project with confidence and her innate comfortable familiarity to designing a home. The skills she brings to her work have been honed by a variety of mentors including a senior project manager who trained her in design aesthetics and the technical details of residential architecture. Each building block of her career served as a path to her current mentor, Leslie Schneeberger (discussed earlier). "Having mentors with varying skills, knowledge, and different personalities have been major contributors to my growth and success in this industry."

When asked about what it means to be a woman in architecture, she says, "We as women understand the power of clear communication, we know how

to build relationships to make them long lasting and we also know patience and that nothing is gained from short cuts. The path to success should be steady and can be long, but that's what makes it rewarding." Manfredo's advice to young women: If you want something and are willing to put in the effort and work for it, it will happen. Have confidence in yourself and lean on others that can help you get there."

JOY CUMING FOUNDER, ARCHITECT ALINE ARCHITECTURE

Joy Cuming spent 15 years working in large corporate design offices, and most of that time she felt disillusioned. She illustrates the effect a great mentor can have when it comes to inspiring someone with talent and desire. "I joined Alan Dodge in 1994, an architect in Wellfleet who had a creative design studio," she recalls. "He reinspired me to continue on in the field of architecture." As Cuming first navigated her way through meetings at construction sites, she says she felt marginalized



Joy Cuming

and would align herself with a male coworker to ensure she was heard.

"I have always felt very supported by my clients, many of whom have expressed an interest in working with a woman," Cuming says of the special relationship she has always been able to build with the people whose homes she is trusted to design. Cuming seems to be a product of the times, as her educational and field experience did in fact present assumptions and exclusions as directed toward a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field. When Cuming's path veered toward a more modern sensibility, it always involved her proactive efforts to blaze her own trail.

After being hired as a lecturer at a university's school of architecture, "I started a support/consciousness raising group which helped support and encourage female graduates to stay in the field and become registered as architects," she shares. "Over the five years I taught there, I saw more and more women enroll and succeed in a very challenging course."

Today, after starting her own architecture and design-build practice with ten employees, Cuming says, "There are so many more women in the field today that I no longer feel like an extreme minority."

MARKETING CRYSTAL PIESCHEL DIRECTOR OF MARKETING MID-CAPE HOME CENTERS

Marketing has been a great avenue for women over several decades. What makes Crystal Pieschel's



Crystal Pieschel

Pieschel iterates that the need to earn respect is an ongoing effort. "Earning and maintaining respect appears to be more challenging," she says. "The magnifying glass on a woman's actions is probably ten times the strength as the glass on a man's actions. But with confidence and preparation, I know that I am capable of earning the respect of most of my peers, both the men and the women. And the women I respect practice the same commitment to excellence."

ANDREA BAERENWALD DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AGWAY OF CAPE COD

If Mid-Cape Home Centers is the backbone of the building industry, Agway of Cape Cod is arguably the fertile ground which fosters the landscape and green businesses across the Cape. Andrea Baerenwald, Agway's Director of Marketing brings a depth of knowledge and understanding



Andrea Baerenwald