

BUILDERUPDATE

Volume XXI, Issue 10, October, 2004

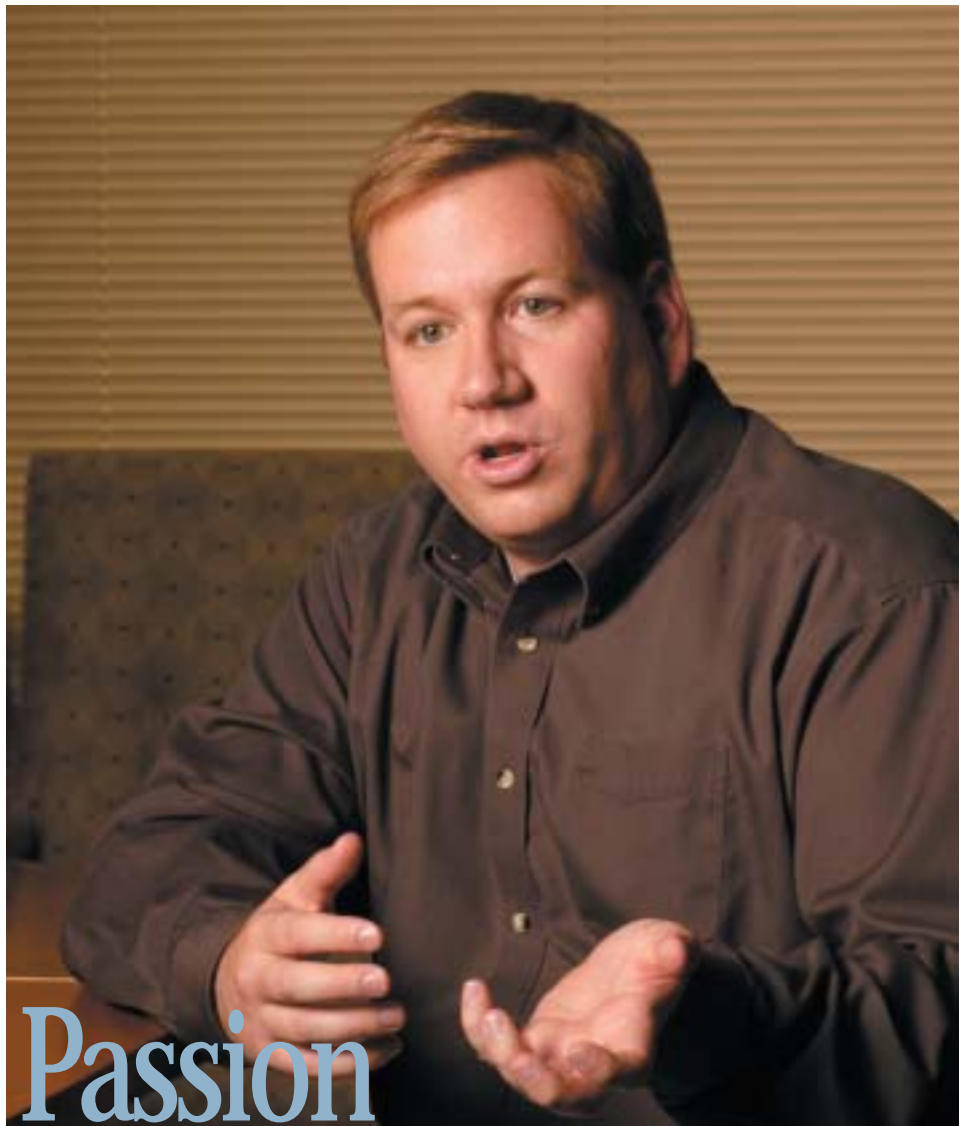


Mark Braunsdorf:
Passion for Building

An Official Publication of the
Building Industry Association of Central Ohio

Mark Braunsdorf:

Passion for Building



Mark Braunsdorf, president of Compass Homes, eats, sleeps and dreams home building. His enthusiasm infuses every aspect of his business, from the materials he chooses to the way he works with his employees to the relationships he has with his buyers

"It comes down to passion," says Braunsdorf. "I have an absolute passion for this business. It's part of who I am. It's everything I do, from selling to building to managing the business."

Braunsdorf's love for building is evident in how deeply his custom home building company delves into the details. He has an unerring eye for the specifics, as well as a powerful desire to get them right.

Sociable, smart and completely committed to his industry, Braunsdorf even takes his enthusiasm for the details to his internal office procedures. "Part of our passion is putting all these details together. We're very systematized, although we're careful not to create red tape. We have an office and a field process manual, so our systems are not just in somebody's head."

Before he started Compass Homes four years ago, Braunsdorf held substantial positions in several home building businesses and he learned about building from the ground up. Braunsdorf puts this experience to work every day. However, his passion for his profession motivates him to continue to learn. "We are continually striving to get better at everything we do," he says.

Whether it's attending the NAHB annual trade show, meeting with a client, picking up expertise from a vendor or attending BIA meetings, Braunsdorf makes it a point to get as much as he can from every professional encounter. In particular, he says that he draws on the expertise of his subcontractors. Another sign of his commitment to continuous learning: he sends his employees to classes and seminars.

Braunsdorf has taken what he learned and put it to use. For their first three years of operation, Compass Homes created two to three homes per year, chiefly in Gahanna, New Albany, Johnstown, Powell and southern Delaware County. This year, they will build about ten.

The company builds in two price points: entry level, \$190,000 to \$220,000, and luxury move up, \$400,000 to a million and above.

Born to build

Originally from Rochester, New York, Braunsdorf literally can't remember a time when he didn't want to be in the building business. His lawyer father and college professor mother like to tell the story about taking their young son to a grocery store that was being remodeled and his extraordinary reaction to the store's blueprints. Although he was only three, Braunsdorf displayed immediate interest. "I said, who did that," he remembers. "I told my parents that I wanted to be a builder in the summer and an architect in the winter."

As a child, Braunsdorf enjoyed taking things apart and putting them back together, and his parents encouraged him. When he was 16 he took an after-school job working for a neighborhood carpenter and began his career.

"In my whole life I've never done anything but build houses," says Braunsdorf. "I've been in this business more than half of my life."

In 1993 Braunsdorf graduated from The College of Wooster in Ohio with a theater degree. His concentration in scene design and lighting was true to his interest in construction.

After college, Braunsdorf went to work for Ryan Homes in his home town of Rochester. However, he wanted to live in Columbus and when an opportunity opened for him to take a job with M/I's Showcase Homes, he seized it. He later moved to Buffalo to help open a division for Ryan Homes, but he missed Columbus and moved back to sell new homes.

Braunsdorf worked for four years for Joshua Homes, doing estimating and purchasing, before moving on to what he

had wanted to do from the start -- running his own home building business.

Direction for innovation

Braunsdorf started his company on Columbus Day in 2000, and named it Compass Homes. He says he grew up

ABOUT COMPASS HOMES

BIA involvement:

- Member since October 2000
- Co-chair of Next Generation Builders
- Sponsored BIA building brick
- Vendor at New Home Building Seminar

Other distinctions:

- Member of Master Builder Council
- Trustee of Builder 20 Club
- In the process of becoming a Certified Graduate Builder through NAHB

Contact Compass Homes at
475 Radclif Drive, Westerville, OH 43082,
(614) 895-1800, mark@compassshomes.com
or visit www.compassshomes.com

sailing, and called his new organization "Compass" because, "it's a new direction, the direction you want to go."

Compass Homes built their first home in the Jefferson Country Club community, and the process delighted Braunsdorf. "The first time we built a house -- it was kind of amazing to complete it and have people move in," he says. "It was a dream come true."

Today, Compass Homes has three employees and a steady group of subcontractors.

Braunsdorf pours his love of building into his company. "What we try to do in our houses is think about how people really live," he says.

For example, Compass Homes has

just added as standard, a niche near the back door where people can stow their keys and cell phone. The area even has an outlet so you can plug in and charge your cell phone. "You'll never run late because you were looking for your keys but if you do run late you can call the person because your cell phone's been charged," he jokes.

Taking into account what his buyers really want, Braunsdorf has built features that include ultra-large showers, two laundry rooms in a single home and spacious mud rooms with plenty of storage. To create interesting rooms without making them vaulted, Compass Homes has constructed beautiful coffered ceilings.

"Large mudrooms, spacious closets, oversized walk-in pantries, warm lighting in the kitchen -- all those things people really use -- people will respond to them, it makes the home work that much better" he observes. "I'm a big believer in a good return for your money. In other words, you can spend a thousand dollars and make it look like you spent five thousand."

Braunsdorf leverages what he learned in theater lighting classes and from lighting vendors, to create rooms that shine with light. "Large windows and lots of them, are something you will notice in our houses," says Braunsdorf. "Natural light can have a significant effect on your mood." Compass Homes adds strategically-directed lighting in kitchens to make them both functional and beautiful. "You walk in and that kitchen glows."

Braunsdorf says he loves to work as a team with his clients, walking them through the process every step of the way. And despite his relish for building, he most enjoys the people and buyers he works with.

"I love putting things together and creating beautiful things, but what I enjoy most are the people," he says. "If you actually listen to the customers and make them happy and set the right expectations, people are very satisfied and there's nothing better."

www.compasshomes.com

