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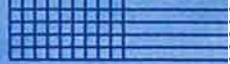
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A Small Firm With A Big Name

THE FIVE-MAN FIRM OF *JOHN LAFFEY ARCHITECTS* IS AT HOME IN THE HIGH-END, CUSTOM RESIDENTIAL MARKET OF LONG ISLAND'S EAST END.

by Amelia Doerflinger



A Long Islander through-and-through, John Laffey has contributed a great deal to the picturesque landscape of Long Island's East End, building many of the areas beautiful homes. With over 16 years of practice behind him, and no end in sight, he has many more notable projects up his sleeve.

"I knew I was going to be an architect all my life," said Laffey, president of John Laffey Architects. "It was a calling, really, and I just couldn't have imagined doing anything else."

After graduating from the New York Institute of Technology, and completing his apprenticeship, Laffey was drawn to the bright and bustling world of New York City architecture. But after a brief stint in the city he realized that residential architecture was his calling, and he headed back to Long Island.

"My first office was 12 feet wide by 22 feet long," Laffey said. Over time, as the workload grew and needs expanded, he gradually took on one or two associates to help. Today, the small, family-like firm consists of Laffey and four associates. A pen-and-ink guy, Laffey

was trained before technology was used in architecture and he prefers hand drawing his initial plans before handing them over for rendering.

"I do work on AutoCAD, but I'm affectionately known as the aging dinosaur in the office," he said. "I'm not very good with it, but I do appreciate it as a tool and for its accuracy and its ability to create the detail in the drawings that the contractors and I require to make really great houses."

Laffey likes to keep the firm small so he can stay involved in all projects. "I'm kind of a control freak," he said. "I try to delegate the work as best I can, but the small setup allows me to be very involved in all the projects we have going on from the design development to the finishing aspects like painting."

Working almost exclusively in the East End, Laffey values the ability to remotely dictate project specifics.

"It's a great environment working out here. I can be on the beach on one job, in the woods looking out over Peconic Bay on another. I can be out in farm fields or on the cliffs overlooking Lake Montauk."

The portfolio boasts a variety of custom

designed dream homes, specializing in Neoclassical architecture. Laffey draws inspiration from 19th and early 20th century Colonial summer homes. Shingle-style architecture makes up about 90 percent of the firm's work.

"If you came to me and asked for an ultra-modern glass concrete house, honestly, I probably would tell you that I'm not your guy," Laffey said. "It's not that I wouldn't enjoy it, but there are guys that do that specifically."

The full-service firm works with the client from start to finish, a process that can take around two years. They begin with the zoning analysis, site plans and budget, and stay till the last coat of paint has dried.

"We're big on team approaches here," Laffey said. "We work with ourselves, with the clients and with the contractor to make sure that everyone stays involved with the project and there is no darkness in the process."

When starting the process Laffey asks the client to bring in pictures of architectural styles and details they like to help clarify their vision for the project. Oftentimes he will bring new clients to tour homes that



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THE CLIENTS WE'VE HAD OVER THE YEARS ARE THE TOP IN THEIR CHOSEN LINE OF WORK. HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE DREAM HOMES FOR THEM AND GET TO KNOW THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES, MAKES FOR VERY REWARDING WORK AND A VERY REWARDING LIFE.





he has previously built to gather inspiration and to provide a clear image of the finished project.

"It's important to me that the client is very invested in their house," Laffey said, "because ultimately that makes the best product."

For a firm that works entirely off word-of-mouth, it's crucial that each house is nothing short of perfect. "You're only as good as your last job," Laffey said. He feels they are lucky to have gotten this far, and that while they are a small firm they have made a big name for themselves.

"As long as my name gets mentioned in Manhattan in the right circles, it trickles down very easily," he said. "The clients we've had over the years are the top in their chosen line of work. Having the opportunity to create dream homes for them and get to know them and their families, makes for very rewarding work and a very rewarding life."

While roughly 90 percent of the firm's work is residential, they also work in the commercial sector and recently completed the historic renovation of a church in Southampton that was built in 1908. Keeping the existing steeple and back wall standing, they rebuilt everything in between, redoing all the glass windows and the pews.

"This was a beautiful old barn that the Polish community had built over 100 years ago. To bring it back to its former glory was incredibly rewarding," Laffey said.

Currently, Laffey is undertaking a 16,000 sq. ft. gymnasium addition for a local parochial school. The addition includes an indoor track that loops around the inside of the second story. Previously, the school's gym operated out of the cafeteria. Laffey's own children have attended the school and he is excited to contribute something that will impact future attendees so positively.

"It was great to see the town come together to back the project in a time when many schools are slimming down," Laffey said.

Despite the economic climate, the firm has stayed busy-- a testament to their skills. The boom of the area peaked in the '90s and Laffey has noticed a definite drop in the past two years, but attributes it mostly to the natural ebb and flow. "We run the office a bit tighter and we're more careful," he said, "but we've held through. The firm has had very low turnover over the years and has kept great relationships with the few people that have left.

"What really sets us apart," Laffey said, "is who we have worked for and what we have accomplished." *ALT*