



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

STORY **JOYCE TURNER-GIONET**

Project Manager Zoran Dakovic and Owner Mario Causevic.



PHOTO: JASON HARTOG

Maki was the nickname given to this popular custom builder when he was a pint-sized kid dreaming about the future in his native Croatia.

At 6 foot 8, Mario Causevic might have made his mark on a basketball court. Instead, his company, **Maki Construction Inc.**, is scoring points for some of the best custom builds and home renovations in Canada.

His height's imposing, but there's nothing imposing about Mario the man. He's warm, engaging, and when he starts talking about his business, the energy that drives him is palpable. "I get lost in my work, so every once in a while my wife, Samira, drags me back to earth," he says. He shares a story. The day Samira and their new baby were due home from the hospital, he sent one of his tradesmen to pick them up. "I had a cement mixer full of fresh cement on the job site and I was the only one qualified to pour it," he says. "Wet cement won't wait and I knew Samira would understand."

"I eventually forgave him," laughs Samira, Maki's operations manager. In business as in life, they appear well-matched.



PHOTO: JASON HARTOG



PHOTO: SAL SICILIANO

One of the first things Mario brings up is the word custom. “Custom is an intimidating word for some people,” he says. “Right away they see dollar signs.” Although Maki is known for its executive custom homes, the company also takes on smaller projects. Maki’s website showcases additions, remodeled interiors, kitchens, bathrooms and commercial spaces. Custom means designed for the uniquely individual way you live and “that shouldn’t mean outrageously expensive!” says Mario.

Sometimes Maki is hired to make a space more functional. In standard builder homes, the furnace and water heater are often stuck the middle of an unfinished basement with ductwork highly visible, spoiling sightlines. A few years down the road, homeowners decide to finish the space, so Maki’s team will move the mechanicals to more practical locations, resulting in more usable space.

For Mario, accountability is important. “Sometimes in older homes we find things behind the wall that shouldn’t be there: faulty wiring, mould, structural issues,” he says. “That’s never something clients like to hear and it can play havoc with their budget, but I won’t close the wall up and ignore it. It’s a reality that I help clients deal with.”

In North America, we’re obsessed with peering into other people’s lives. Horror stories that revolve around home renos gone wrong are big business for TV networks. But what about guys in the business, like Mario? Do they watch these shows? It seems they do: “I’m a fan of HGTV’s Jim Caruk,” he admits.

“He’s honest and down-to-earth. I love the conversations he has with clients because I can relate.”

In the end, it’s about trust. We place our trust in contractors to build our dreams. Zoran Dakovic, Maki’s project manager, agrees: “I provide solutions by putting myself in clients’ shoes, examining all angles in order to choose solutions that provide the most benefit to clients. Trust between builder and homeowner is essential for success, and I truly care that Maki’s clients feel I’m with them every step of the way in their project.”

“When a client chooses Maki to do the work we become a part of their daily routine,” Mario explains. “We’re on site every day, often for months.” More than once, Mario or Samira have met a client’s kids at the school bus because the client was running late. Very few business relationships are this intimate, and clients often end up friends.

Custom is a business built by word of mouth and it hangs its hat on reputation, something Maki has worked hard to cultivate. Mario recalls a client who called him five years after a project was finished. A few pot lights weren’t working, so Mario took over new ones and installed them himself, no charge. “I walked through the space and it brought back so many memories,” he says. Once a client, always a client, is Maki’s philosophy. Maki is not just in the business of building dreams. They’re building relationships designed to last long after the keys to that new custom home are handed over. **OH**



PHOTOS: MARIO CAUSEVIC