

RENOVATOR PROFILE

Meeres Construction Group

A father-and-son team



Ben Meeres (left) and dad/business-partner, Joe.

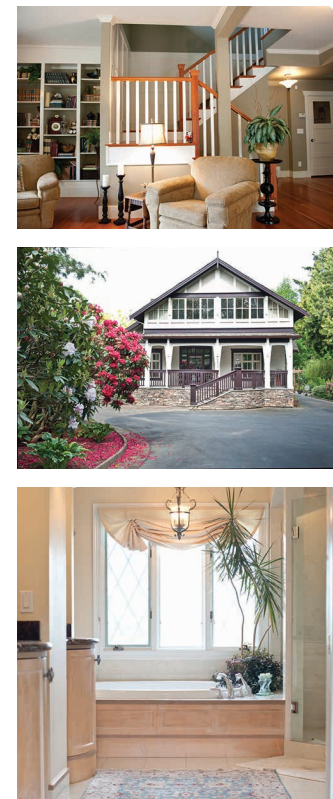
Some family businesses agonize over the details of succession planning. At Meeres Construction in Chilliwack, B.C., father Joe Meeres, 56, and son Ben, 25, have no plan at all - and it's working beautifully. They're focusing on fine-tuning the present: taking on a steady amount of work, balanc-

ing renovations with new builds, splitting the substantive and detail work, and taking a small-town, laid-back approach to nurturing the company. Joe started Meeres Construction in 1981 in partnership with his brother and took the company over a few years later. He

developed an enviable reputation - so key in a small town - following his motto "systems, efficiency, and communication." His three kids helped out a little: Joe paid \$4 an hour for cleanup work. But his eldest daughter had a passion for French and is now living in Switzerland. His youngest son became a serious rugby player. But middle child Ben recalls saving for a new dirt bike in elementary school. So he would take the school bus to as close to jobsites as possible and then work all afternoon until his dad would drive him home. As the years

passed, summers and often weekends and early evenings saw him making extra cash with his dad. "I've never handed out a resume in my life," says Ben. Joe convinced his son to register as a carpentry apprentice when he was in grade 10. When he was 19 he earned his Red Seal certification from the University of Fraser Valley, and was the youngest person in the province to ever complete the program. By then he'd already been with Meeres full time for two years. Then, three years ago, when the project manager left, Ben took a promotion. And father and

son found an ideal recipe that blended experience and style: Joe does the initial consultation and quote and then the demolition and structural work, then Ben's team shows up for installation and finishes. "Joe is pretty much amazing at all of it, but I do have an eye for detail," says Ben. They also set a smart pace: two crews tackling three jobs at a time. Any more, and the work suffers, they found. That balance includes a nearly 50-50 split between new builds and renovations. One project that took advantage of Joe's experience and Ben's love of wood and finishes was a 103-year-old heritage



FAST FACTS

- Name:** Meeres Construction Group Ltd.
- Location:** Chilliwack, B.C.
- Specializing in:** Renovations and new builds
- Number of employees:** 4
- Gross revenue:** \$1.2 million
- Website:** MeeresConstructionGroup.ca



Photos courtesy Meeres Construction Group Ltd. and Liberty Tree Photography

home in Port Moody, an hour from Chilliwack. The client got some heritage tax breaks, but that meant juggling new construction with careful conservation. When they had to replace the roof during the wet coastal summer, they erected a huge tarp over the house to protect the original hardwood floors and plaster walls. Then, there was the custom build on Saturna Island, a gulf island a few hours and a ferry ride distance from home. Meeres rented a house on the island and had crews and trades put in

marathon hours for five-day stints to get the job done on time and on budget. The Cape Cod style house ended up being a showpiece for Ben's skills with wood finishes. These days, Ben has started getting new referrals - after all, he's the last person clients see - but he's still an hourly employee and is in no rush to become a partner or take over and deal with things like the books. "My dad says he's planning for freedom 85," says Ben. "I hope he keeps going until at least 70." —Diane Peters