



HeART, Homes & Family



TONY COTRONEO IS THE PRESIDENT OF ARTISTA HOMES, a company he operates with his brothers Frank, Enzo and Gino. At this moment, Tony and Enzo are with their Sales and Marketing Manager, David De Leeuw, three men in smart black shirts sitting at an even smarter black glass table in the kitchen of one of their fabulous custom home creations, the gold award winner in the Custom Home category of the Manitoba Home Builders Association 2007 Fall Parade of Homes. The image, which makes for a striking first impression and great sales presentation, is actually far more – it's indicative of the genuine connectivity of hearts and minds between the members of this company, its suppliers and its customers.

They see themselves as a “family” – the word comes up surprisingly often in their conversations -and it's a mindset they come by naturally.

“Our father, Antonino, was a stone mason in Italy. He built incredible houses there, and also in Canada. He is a very respectful man who puts his heart and soul into everything he does. We grew up seeing that, and now we're following in his footsteps. There was never any question to do any other line of work. We've always had the passion.”

“We don't just build houses. We help our customers build their dream”, says David, who is also a realtor with Royal LePage Dynamic and has 27 years of industry experience. He was invited to join the Artista Homes family about a year ago, when the company wanted to start an even greater marketing presence

“I felt he had very similar goals and passion”, says Tony. “He was a perfect fit...I told him he'd become part of the family.”

The focus is custom home construction. Or, as the guys put it, “design, construction, communicating and relationships”. Enzo goes even farther: “It's got to be an awesome experience.”

Explains Tony: “We [the brothers and David] are all involved. The clients meet all of us. We all have our individual talents, so each one of us will help the client with design ideas, colour selection, product selection, communication during construction...the clients have all our cell phone numbers, and we encour-





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age them to talk to us as much as they want. We don’t just throw colour charts at them and then throw them to the lions. We assist.”

“Building is a big and exciting process”, David continues. “People like to be treated with respect. If there’s a question, they want it answered. If there’s a problem, they want it fixed. What these guys do so well is participate willingly in making sure everything is perfect.”

“We like what you guys do.”

That refrain is heard repeatedly, between Artista and its suppliers, and between the builder and its customers.

“Most of our suppliers have been with us since we started”, Tony reveals. “Curtis Carpets, Super-Lite, McDiarmid Lumber...we’ve aligned ourselves with suppliers who’ve proven to us that they have a similar mindset. And we never talk down to our trades or our suppliers. We respect their knowledge. We need each other.”

The sentiment is openly shared by their satisfied customers...

“We learned about Artista through their Fairfield Park showhome”, recalls Kristin, who purchased a house with her husband Dion. “We fell in love with the open design concept –it had a catwalk between the living room and the entranceway, and you could stand up there and see over both sides. We couldn’t stop talking about it -we just wanted that house! But we hadn’t yet sold the house we had. And when it was sold, even though it sold quite quickly, the show home had also been sold! So we went to our realtor, and had him contact Artista and find out where else they had available building lots.

“We hit it off immediately when we met them. We didn’t shop around because we liked them so much. We basically just said ‘Build us that house!!’ They were wonderful to deal with. If we ever had any concerns, we could call Tony, Enzo or Gino directly, and we’d never get a middleman. We never hesitated to ask them anything.

“The construction went from April to Sep-

tember of 2007, and they were within one week of their original estimated possession date.

The whole process was very easygoing, and they’ve even popped over since we moved in, to ask how things were going...we’re planning to invite them over for supper. We feel that we’ve gained friends.”

Of course, builders always refer their best satisfied customers...you’re probably thinking right about now. But if what you’ve just read sounds a little too good, and you’re feeling a little cynical, then read on for a second opinion, all the way from the west coast...Artista evidently provides very much of a good thing, even long-distance.

Raj and Ruby relocated from Winnipeg to British Columbia with their jobs, but friends were always encouraging them to move back...

“We had a three-and-a half hour total daily commute into Vancouver from the Fraser Valley, where we’d build a townhouse, and if it ever snowed that commute went to almost five hours!...I’d be lying if I didn’t say I’d hit my breaking point”, said Raj. “Finding Artista was probably a Godsend. We’d come back to Winnipeg to attend a funeral in February, and we had an hour to spare before we had to get to the airport. Friends pushed us to see this show home –and we were simply awestruck! I’m a fan of architecture and the design flowed so neatly, and the presentation was just amazing: When you walk through a show home in BC, just about every little thing you see has a sticker on it reading ‘This is an upgrade’. Not here. My wife and I had been considering building in Langley, and we calculated that something similar there, 2100 square feet, would easily be over \$800K. We talked about it on the plane ride back. I think that was when I decided there was a better life in Winnipeg, and I wasn’t going to sacrifice myself and time with my new son just to live in a city with mountains I never had time to see.

“We’d spoken with David in Winnipeg, and he emailed us tons of pictures. David was really part of the team. He shared our motivations,

he shared his own life lessons. He was almost fatherly. When we purchased the show home design, David handed us over to Enzo and Tony, and they were equally protective. They treated us like family, and we really valued that.

“The whole build was done over the phone and email, although I tried to keep up by viewing the progress on Google Earth, if you know what that is!...Artista embraced our situation and developed our trust. Their emails always went something like, ‘I was on the site myself today’ instead of ‘This has been done’. They were always communicating, without us having to ask. In BC, builders won’t return calls. We were even warned by friends who’d had horrible building experiences not to haggle or complain, or it would cause trouble. But not for us! Artista made us feel like a priority. They don’t spread themselves so thin they can’t keep in touch, or maintain their standard. I can count on one hand the number of times one of my calls to them went to voicemail. Construction went from May until later this month [November], when we’ll move in, and the date they originally told us is the date they’ll deliver. They have great project management. And I’d say our relationship has now crossed over into friendship.”

Back at the classy black glass table, Tony and Enzo modestly offer a last word on their philosophy.

“Our mission is to be the leader in customer service and custom home building”, Tony affirms. “But it’s way more than just a business transaction. When customers are ecstatic...you can’t buy that.”

Enzo finishes the thought: “When a client hires us, they’re saying, ‘We’re trusting you to build our dream home’. That’s huge. And we want to give back.” ■