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# HOMES & Decor

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## PENNY GOTTO

*luxury building is in her genes* 14

**CITYSTATE**  
Building Better  
Communities

8

**SILVER FERN  
LANDSCAPING**  
Landscaping with a  
Personal Touch

16

**DAVE COYLE  
ANTIQUES**  
Quality Hand-Crafted  
Reproductions

22

**WOOD  
WONDERS**  
The Art of Grove  
Front Gallery

28



# PENNY GOTTO

*luxury building is in her genes*

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**P**enny Gotto is an early riser. She has to be as she works 10 to 12 hour days running her construction company, Green Vista Contracting. Since 2011, Gotto has been renovating and building new homes up and down the Sunshine Coast. Started as a sole proprietorship in 2008, Green Vista Contracting is now an incorporated company with 14 employees. The company currently has five projects on the go that will keep them busy until at least summer.

Gotto grew up on Vancouver Island and for her, building is in her genes. Her father was a window salesman and her grandfather a shipbuilder. "When I was a little kid, I used to draw floor plans for houses on graph paper," recalls Gotto. "I wanted to be an architect." She applied to study civil engineering at UBC, and while she was accepted, life got in the way and she never attended. "In hindsight, its probably for the best," says Gotto. "I would have hated being in an office all the time. Architecture would have been drawing houses and I like to actually physically build them."

Before getting into building, she ran the ski lift operations in Whistler, then transferred into the building maintenance division. An apprenticeship position came up, and while she didn't get it, she realized she wanted to stay in the industry. She applied to the entry level trades training at BCIT, earned her journeyman carpenter ticket and began working with Vision Pacific Contracting on some very high end houses.



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"The very first house I worked on for them sold for \$18 million when we were finished," Gotto says. That early training on luxury homes developed her eye for fine detail. "I had to go backwards from there, learning how to speed things up," she says. "It's hard to train that level of care. It's easier to train speed."

She then spent four years as a project manager for Wide Open Welding. "I figured it would put another tool in my toolbox," she says, and she was right as the skills she picked up estimating jobs and managing multiple projects have proven invaluable to running her own construction company. Her first project on the Coast was taking over a housing project in mid-build that came with a four person crew. When that build was completed, she landed another one, kept the crew, and it just kept going, year after year, with the company and crew growing. "I didn't plan on running a mid-size company," says Gotto. "I started because I wanted to do a couple of projects on my own and it just grew organically from there."

Today the company is known for its quality builds and stunning renovation work. While the

overwhelming majority of the work is residential, it was the Green Vista team that did the renovations to the commercial kitchen, dining space and deck at John Henry's Marina and Resort. "New construction is always easier," says Gotto of the difference between new builds and renovations. "But I do really love taking an old, disgusting house and turning it into a gem." Gotto also enjoys the variety and constant change that her line of work affords. "Plus I've got an eclectic crew," she adds. "I have one guy who came strictly from a roofing background; another guy who has done lots of vinyl decking and glass railings; another one who has a degree in heritage carpentry. I feel like there's not anything that we don't have someone on the crew who's a specialist at."

Over her 17-year career, Gotto has at times experienced some sexist attitudes, but claims she's never felt that being a woman in the trades has been a disadvantage. Rather, on occasion, it may have given her an edge. "A lot of the driving force behind building houses, and certainly with renovating, is the woman in the relationship," she says. "I think the women feel like it's easier to talk to another woman." Gotto believes in building rapport with her clients whoever they are, listening carefully in consultations to determine their wants and needs. She works directly with clients who drive the design, as well as working with architects and interior designers. "The most crucial thing is to have a budget," says Gotto about working with clients. "There's so much on the internet that people would love to have but that are outside of their budgets." Clients who prepare wish books or gather photos of what they envision for their home help Gotto and her team during the consultation phase to prepare realistic costs and offer alternatives to stay on budget. "It's important to be very clear about what their budget constraints are before they go into a design process," emphasizes Gotto.

Despite her busy schedule, Gotto has been a member of the Pender Harbour Search and Rescue team since 2012. "I wanted to give back and join the community in a way that was making some impact," she says. Community and family ties are important to Gotto, who acknowledges that her staff are key to the company's success. "They're an incredible group of people and I would not be able to do my job without every single one of them," she says. "Most of them are long term employees and they're family to me."

[www.greenvistacontracting.com](http://www.greenvistacontracting.com)

-Anna Nobile