

by Susan Hunsinger

Bring New Life to Old Decatur Homes

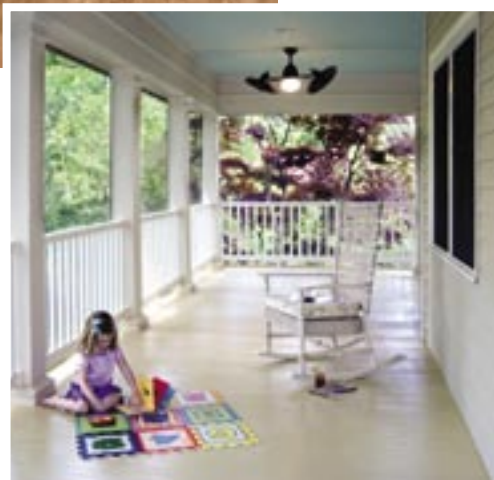
Renewal Construction, Fourth-Generation Builders



In collaboration with the architect, Stacie Monroe at Reform Inc., Renewal Construction enhances the homes original character while providing modern conveniences.

Peter Michelson, CEO of Renewal Construction and fourth-generation construction business owner, is also a former schoolteacher. Maybe that's why he stresses educating clients about the renovation process. "Homeowners may have no experience with remodeling. A six-month project captured in a 30-minute TV show isn't really educating them. It's our job to guide them and let them know what those realities are. For example, there are some similarities between renovating and buying a new car, in that there are different price points, options, and alternates depending upon what features you value most. We strive to make sure that our clients know what is possible at different price points."

Judging from the company's growth since it was founded in 2001, it's an approach Decatur-area homeowners appreciate. Renewal's projects numbered more than 50 in 2006, and more than half of that was generated by referrals. Peter's brother, David Michelson, is the company president.



Renewal Construction, Inc. is a full-service remodeling contractor. They offer kitchen and bath renovations, attic renovations and second story additions, major additions, and whole-house renovations. Two years ago they added their popular Small Projects Division. Additionally, Renewal Construction was named Renovator of the Year for 2005 by EarthCraft House. EarthCraft is a voluntary green building program to make houses more energy efficient, reduce utility costs, and protect the environment.

The company moved into their new offices at 124 South Columbia Drive five



Custom built-in breakfast nook best utilizes space, while windows maximize the morning light.

months ago. “Intentionally, all of our projects are within a five-mile radius of Decatur. We know the houses within our radius, from Inman Park to Avondale Estates. We understand their charms and their challenges. We are a focused company, and we excel at what we do. Our people are top-notch in the industry,” affirms Michelson.

Renewal is one of only a few residential companies employing a pre-construction manager. “Taking that time and care in the beginning is more work, but it ultimately saves clients money, time and headache. Many contractors don’t get that vital information about damaged water lines and undersized electrical systems, for example, only to tell clients halfway through a project that their estimate has doubled.”

Also, Renewal stresses a team approach between homeowners, architect and contractor. “We love working with architects, and recommend several very highly.”

The Michelson brothers grew up in the construction business. A former pipe fitter/plumber, their Russian-born great-grandfather Joseph Slotnik founded his construction company in 1896 in Boston. By the early 1970s, Peter and David’s father, Joseph Michelson ran it. The commercial company specialized in projects such as schools and hospitals. David worked in that company for more than 15 years as a project manager, and both brothers have extensive construction experience prior to starting Renewal. Initially, Peter entered residential construction in San Francisco, working as a carpenter restoring Victorian homes.

“Intentionally, all of our projects are within a five-mile radius of Decatur. We know the houses within our radius, from Inman Park to Avondale Estates. We understand their charms and their challenges. We are a focused company, and we excel at what we do. Our people are top-notch in the industry.”

— Peter Michelson



Custom vanity with handmade subway tile countertop and custom linen niche.

“We’re at heart a family business,” say both brothers. “We have exceptionally high expectations for everyone who works for us, and in turn, we compensate them fairly. Renewal pays its full burden of taxes and insurance, something not always common in our field, unfortunately. And we’re proud of the fact that our employees are able to pursue home ownership themselves.”

Giving back to the community is another value the Michelson family continues in this generation. Renewal renovated an entire school building at cost for the Waldorf School, saving the non-profit more than \$60,000. And they, along with painters who work for them, restored the gazebo in the historic Decatur Cemetery. Currently, the Michelsons are making plans to establish an annual grant process to select construction projects for deserving non-profits in metro Decatur.

But both brothers acknowledge the difference in the commercial, bottom-line driven industry they grew up in, and the emotional and intimate nature of Renewal’s residential projects. “Home is where your heart is,” says Peter. “Sharing that space with our company is an honor, and we don’t take it lightly.”

According to Peter, “When homeowners tell us they were completely comfortable with every single worker in their home, and think they got the best value with us, that’s what we want to hear. Our company’s reputation is only as good as our last job.”

“And,” adds David Michelson, “unlike those TV shows, every project will have a glitch, a hiccup, at some point. But it’s resolving those problems to the client’s satisfaction that distinguishes our company. When the whole process is finished and homeowners exclaim, ‘It’s better than we even imagined’ — that’s my favorite compliment.”

Photography by Terry Greene.



Peter Michelson left, David Michelson right.