

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH

## The Integrated Services of *Designblendz Construction*

by Chancellor Page

**A**rchitecture, construction and design have always been at the service of the social environment. Innovators in each field have shaped how we live, allowing us to imagine and dream of new possibilities. Today, form still follows function, and while there are challenges unique to our era, there are innovators moving the needle of progress.

One such company, *Designblendz Construction*, continues to be at the forefront of what's possible in the building market. Established by a close-knit group of friends—Mike Andrew,

Tony Hopkins, Scott Woodruff, AIA and Brian Corcodilos—*Designblendz* was formed as a rendering company in 2013, then found its legs offering architectural consultancy, and now blends the disciplines of architecture, 3D experiential marketing, and construction solutions based out of Philadelphia.

“My business partners Tony, Scott and Brian, went to school for architecture at Philadelphia University and I studied construction management,” says Mike, Director of Construction, *Designblendz*. “We were interested in blending all the disciplines of design.”



The *Designblendz Construction* team completes framing and installs waterproof Zip System® sheathing, windows and brick for a South Philadelphia row home project.



The four founders of Designblendz Construction are (from left to right) Scott Woodruff, Director, Architecture; Brian Corcodilos, CEO; Mike Andrew, Director, Construction; and Tony Hopkins, Director, 3D Experiences & Marketing. As friends, colleagues and business partners, they created a one-stop shop in the building market.

This team recognized that standard procedure for a project was costing clients valuable time and money. They felt they could bring something meaningful to the table, a one-stop shop of talent and expertise that would fulfill the needs of the industry and exceed the expectations of their clients.

“Slowly over the years, the pieces started to come together,” Mike says. “The driving force behind this was the 3D rendering and the real estate marketing, which led to the architecture and the construction, which was the last, and some say, trickiest piece of the puzzle.”

Today, Designblendz is a fully established company with 20 employees, focusing on three main disciplines: architecture, 3D experiences and construction.

“A client can come to us for as little or as much as they want,” Mike says. “They can come to us for full service, and I’ll sit alongside them, which we call the design-build process—from Day One the team is designing a project which fits with their budget. ...A client will go to an architect to design a single-family home or a commercial fit-out

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The ability to adapt and work together and rely on one another’s expertise helps the team come together to understand challenges and identify solutions that leverage their collective talents. Moreover, they’ve established a client-first, never-settle mindset that imbues every employee with confidence and freedom to do their best work.



The Designblendz Construction team tops a panelized New Jersey town home project with roof trusses.



Three new construction luxury town homes in New Jersey fully framed, windows installed and brick completed.



Designblendz Construction completed all exterior facade and landscaping at this New Jersey project.

space, and then they'll get five bids from different contractors; and every contractor will come in \$100,000 over their budget. So, they end up going back to the architect for a redesign and they have to pay the architect again and lose weeks and months of time to redesign it. We cut that middle ground out. That's something that makes us unique—we can alleviate all that stress ahead of time."

## CHALLENGES AND A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

There were lessons learned along the way, challenges that formed this

team's resolve early on. Because of their youth, they had to overcome the perception of inexperience and prove their critics wrong. They drew upon their talent and a willingness to excel and outdo their competition on every project and made sacrifices to get their business off the ground. One of the core values of the company is to "never settle" and that was the driving force to where they are today.

"One of the biggest challenges that we all faced when we started is that we were all young," Mike says. "We started this right out of school. There were a lot of naysayers who said, 'You

can't do this' or 'You're too young to do that.' We continually proved them wrong with great work and taking care of our clients' needs above and beyond what they expected. The staff that we have in-house here is the most dedicated staff I've ever been a part of. Every single person in the company treats it as their company."

There's an uncommon bond to this group of friends who studied, lived and worked together. "When you have a team this close, one that recognizes, respects and leverages one another's talents, the sky's the limit," Mike says. Mike, Tony, Brian and Scott committed their time, focus and energy to a business that would pave the way for their future, and the future of the industry.

"We have a great mix, because we can separate the business and personal relationships," Mike says. "We can all sit down at the conference table and have our business meetings and tell somebody how it is; but at the end of the day, we're still good friends. Because obviously business is business. What makes us special is that we're each good at what we do. We don't try to do something that we're not proficient at. For instance, Scott is our licensed architect and I think he has some of the best designs in the city. I would never try to design a house for him. Tony is amazing at 3D renderings and telling stories through 3D experiences. And Brian has some of the best leadership and business instincts to help steer all the ships in the right direction."

## GROWING A DEDICATED TEAM

The four company founders believe that by sticking to their strong points,

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Mike Andrew (left) and Matt Gressen, Site Operations Manager, review project schedules at a weekly project meeting. These planning periods allow the Designblendz Construction team to assess risk, analyze costs and become more efficient and productive for their clients.

**“We’re all super-dedicated. We all put our lives on hold to create this business.”**

**Mike Andrew,  
Director of Construction,  
Designblendz Construction**

environment. There’s music, camaraderie, belief in the work, weekly huddles, retreats, transparency and a great energy. There’s also the contribution of time and a commitment to the community. Mike gives his time to the ACE Mentor Program of Eastern Pennsylvania, located in Philadelphia.

“It’s something I was actually a part of when I was in high school,” Mike says. “You mentor high school students and they have to design something but also provide the budget. It’s a state competition that gives the opportunity for students to earn scholarships.”

Tony Hopkins teaches at Philadelphia University, now Thomas Jefferson University (TJU), to inspire students to create stories through 3D experiences. Brian Corcodilos mentors other business owners to help them learn to grow and scale their businesses; he is also a board member of the Roxborough Development Corporation to help improve Ridge Avenue in Philadelphia, and he sits on the Advancement Council at the College of Architecture and the Built Environment at TJU.

they’ve been able to create truly great work and grow a strong team in a truly unique culture.

“We’re all super-dedicated,” Mike says. “We put our lives on hold to create this business. And it’s extremely rewarding to walk upstairs and see all the smiling faces of the employees and know that they enjoy their job. It’s not just a 9-to-5. We have a good camaraderie here.”

That sense of accountability and belief in the company establishes a sense of ownership that makes the

day-to-day activities enjoyable for the Designblendz team.

“We just enacted unlimited vacation. It’s a reward that we offer to the team because everybody here works extremely hard and treats the company as if it’s their own. If somebody needs to work 60 hours one week, they’re going to do it; but if they put in that extra time and they need to take a day off just to get their mindset right, it’s OK.”

Mike says they have a very young, hungry team and an open office



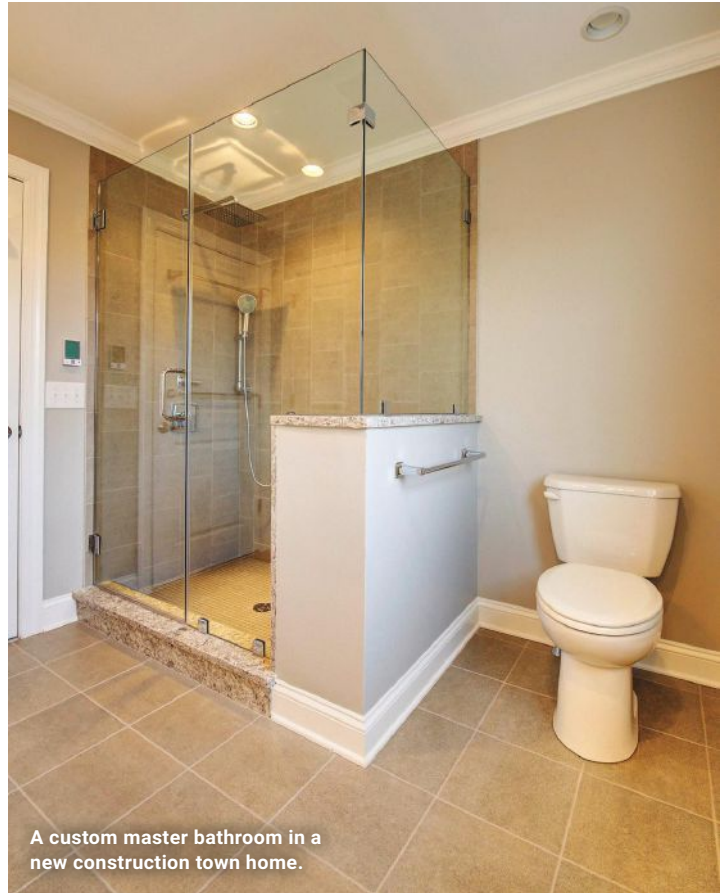
Interior finishes are a specialty of the Designblendz Construction team. Here, they've installed a high-end custom kitchen featuring soapstone counter tops and inset kitchen door cabinets in New Jersey.

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The ability to adapt and work together and rely on one another's expertise helps the team come together to understand challenges and identify solutions that leverage their collective talents. Moreover, they've established a client-first, never-settle mindset that imbues every employee with confidence and freedom to do their best work.

"One of our main things is to never settle," Mike says. "That is the mentality that every one of our employees has. Every single day, for the business and for our clients, we ask, 'How can we wake up and do something better that day and make everybody better?' And the biggest thing is that none of our team members are out for themselves. We're all for the business and for our clients."

It's true that clients come in with a variety of problems. Maybe a contractor didn't do a great job or they need a design to maximize the square feet of an area. Whatever the project, Designblendz will handle it. On the construction side, they've done multifamily, new constructions, rehabs and commercial outfits. In architectural design, they've created everything from small floor plans to hotels.



A custom master bathroom in a new construction town home.



Designblendz Construction completes framing and windows at two new construction luxury town homes in Philadelphia.



Designblendz Construction designed a new construction town home in South Philadelphia between two existing town homes. Here it is shown fully completed.

And with 3D rendering, they've been able to help developers pre-sell and lease real estate before a shovel hits the ground.

"We just sent out a project where we created a fully optimized website with 3D renderings and floor plans for a five-unit townhouse project," Mike says. "And in five days, there were already three agreements of sale. It's pretty impressive what our 3D experience and marketing department is creating."

He also tells the story of a time when they were hired to build a third story and a roof deck on a two-story family home. When they started tearing the structure down, he realized that the original structure was no longer stable.

"I had Scott come out and we problem-solved it, and we ended up pouring new footings in the basement and we literally framed a house within a house," Mike says. "The best part of that was I had Scott out there the

next day and revised drawings from him in two days—and I had my guys back on site one day after. So, what could have been weeks and weeks of delays, between going from construction to the architect to the owner, back and forth...[took] three to four business days. This was tremendous for them because, as a developer, you have holding costs, and every day you're delayed, you're losing money."

It's that type of adaptability and collective expertise that has made this company so valued by their clients.

"It's a really nice collaborative that we have, to be able to bounce ideas off one another and all the other guys upstairs, because everybody has such great ideas, and everybody has such different viewpoints." Mike says. "It really makes this a holistic approach."

## THE 'AH-HA' MOMENTS

Adopting a new tool or process to reduce or eliminate inefficiencies can do wonders for a thriving company. Recently, this team began using a program to track the progress of their business. While clients see only the results, it's the analysis, problem-solving and collaboration



A new custom kitchen by Designblendz Construction in Philadelphia's Fishtown neighborhood includes a waterfall countertop, butcher block counters and farmhouse sink.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DESIGNBLENDZ CONSTRUCTION (TOP LEFT); DAVE APPLE (TOP RIGHT & BOTTOM)



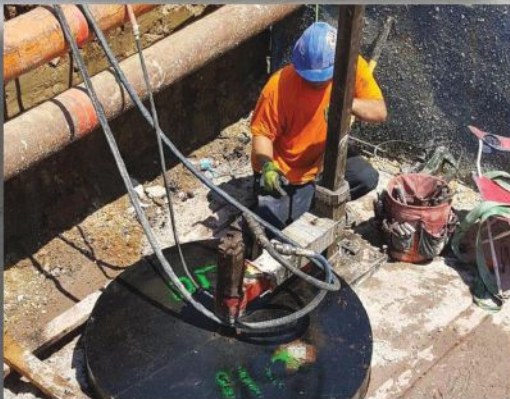
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Designblendz Construction leveled and completed rough framing with mechanical rough-ins for a soon-to-be-completed sushi restaurant in Philadelphia.



Designblendz Construction recently finished this restaurant, @Ramen, located in Philadelphia.

behind-the-scenes that makes Designblendz tick. Driving self-awareness as a company continues to lead to great customer care and service, while allowing Mike, Tony, Brian and Scott to assess risk, fold in innovation, and challenge the status quo to the full measure of their expertise and passion.

"It's changed the way that we run our business," Mike says. "Every week, we'll sit down and look at how many

proposals we sent out, how many contracts we signed and how much money came through the door. When you start looking at your business on a weekly schedule like that, you allow yourself to look at key points and indicators that show you where you're headed and where your strong points are. That precision allows us to really focus.

"It came down to how we tracked our business. It was a matter of what

made us stronger as a company, what we were successful at and what we didn't succeed at. Those were the 'Ah-ha' moments," Mike continues.

## A GRAND VISION

Over the next decade, Designblendz aspires to introduce their portfolio of services to multiple cities nationwide, while building on the skill and motivation of the team—a team that continues to pursue excellence and efficiency in every project, refining solutions and services for their clients every step of the way.

"We want to offer our clients the best service that we can," Mike says. "We're all young and we're all very technology-based, and we're not afraid to make changes to our processes and systems if we find a better software to use or we find a better system."

Designblendz continues to advance innovations within the building market by creating technology to expedite the processes from architecture through construction. By developing custom scripts and software, they're making the real estate development process easier for their clients.

"We want to take inefficiencies out of projects, and put efficiencies in, allowing us to build things faster, build things that are more cost-effective on a greater scale for our clients," Mike says. "We see grand visions, I guess you could say." 🐼

*Chancellor Page is a copywriter, editor and adjunct professor who enjoys storytelling and exploring what makes company leaders tick.*