

## ROBINSON CONTRACTING (LINDSAY) LTD.

Husband and wife team specializing in energy-efficient custom homes

BY ADAM POLLOCK

IT ISN'T OFTEN THAT A BUILDER'S OWN home becomes the centerpiece of its portfolio. But that is exactly what has happened for Robinson Contracting (Lindsay) Ltd., a company owned by husband-and-wife team John and Brenda Robinson.

"Since 2007 we've been concentrating on building our new house so that has skewed our sales a bit, but this project has generated a lot of interest for us," explains John Robinson, owner. "It has been phenomenal, probably the single most important thing we've done in 20 years in terms of improving and growing the business."

### AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:**  
LINDSAY, ON

**AREA OF SPECIALTY:**  
CUSTOM HOMES AND  
GENERAL CONTRACTING

**SALES IN 2008:**  
\$1 MILLION+

**EMPLOYEES:**  
7+

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But just what is so special about their new energy-efficient abode? For one thing, the main component in the construction is insulated concrete form (ICF). That's only one among many green features the house boasts. "In addition to the ICF, our home also has a geothermal heating system. All the heat for the house comes from the ground," says Brenda. "We don't have propane or oil tanks, and no fossil fuels are used for heating. The heat comes from the geothermal coils that are sunk in a pond on the property."

These innovative features have attracted a lot of attention—more than the builders could have anticipated. "We've secured a fair bit of work because of this house," Brenda said. "People are really interested in energy efficiency these days and because this is an ICF house



*The master bedroom in contractor's John and Brenda Robinson's home in Lindsay, Ontario.*

and is certified R-2000, the highest quality standard in Canada for residential building, and is in a very visible area just off a major highway, there has been a lot of feedback from people who travel the route. During construction, on one day alone we had six carloads of people requesting a tour. Next week we're having the first of three open houses and have invited about 300 people who have commented on it during construction and want to see it."

Admirers are also attracted to the home's Georgian style, which features a combination of stone and siding. "The house was designed to look like an old stone farmhouse with 'additions'—i.e., the additions being the part of the house with siding," Brenda explains. "The stone is so authentic that a couple of

people have asked if we renovated an old farmhouse and said they didn't recall seeing it a house here before!"

John and Brenda met in university in the '70s. After graduating, they moved to Alberta to pursue their careers—John as a planner and Brenda as a systems analyst. Indulging their hobby for renovating houses meant that they soon became competent at construction methods, and when, after 10 years, they decided to move back to Ontario, an obvious change of career revealed itself.

Robinson Contracting was born.

The team's work started as a combination of residential construction and renovations, as well as commercial and industrial renovations, including their

accountant's office and the local hospital. (Lindsay is a small town.) Over the last few years, the company has moved into energy-efficient custom homes as well.

"Up until three years ago, I always worked apart from the business," Brenda says. "My last position was as a finance manager with the local municipality. We work well together; we both have our areas of expertise. John works in the field more, does all the estimating and manages the employees in the field, and I manage payroll, benefits, accounting, and job costs."

The two areas of specialty that are at the core of the Robinson's business, insulated concrete form and geothermal heating, are proving to be major selling points for the company as North America wakes up to the increased need for energy-efficient products, including buildings. "Concrete is the most important product in residential building design in Europe, and for a lot of the world, and in America, the trend is definitely growing," John says. "This [the couple's] house is much more moisture,

fire, and sound resistant than conventional wood frame houses. It has foam insulation inside and out with a reinforced concrete core.

"A prime example of the solidity of these structures is what happened during Hurricane Katrina, where the ICF houses held firm while others didn't. They were flattened, [while] these are very strong"

The Robinsons are adept at creating the most energy-efficient scenario for each project, aided of course by trained and reliable employees, including son Jamie. Brenda also points to the couple's long-term working relationships with their subtrades as a reason behind the company's success.

And so while many businesses are looking ahead with trepidation, Robinson Contracting remains upbeat, knowing that interest in energy efficiency is finally being taken seriously in Canada. "2009 looks good," says Brenda. "We're already working toward a spring start for a very interesting project." CBQ



John and Brenda Robinson, owners, specialize in custom insulated concrete form homes.

“All the heat for the house comes from the ground. We don't have propane or oil tanks, and no fossil fuels are used for heating.”

Brenda Robinson, Co-Owner



John and Brenda's luxurious ensuite adjoins their master bedroom.



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Commercial  
& Industrial  
Services**



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Established in 1986, Robinson Contracting (Lindsay) Ltd. is a family-owned General Contracting Company providing quality residential, commercial & industrial construction & renovations. We specialize in energy-efficient custom homes, cottages & additions. We offer professional workmanship, excellent customer service & a high level of product knowledge.

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