

Knickerbocker Group "hosts" Blog Cabin 2012

By SUE MELLO
Staff Reporter

Knickerbocker Group, builders and renovators of fine homes throughout the state for over 30 years, is a local company known for quality craftsmanship and design. Not surprisingly, they are also no stranger to media attention. This past October, Down East Magazine's front cover and issue featured a one-of-a-kind Southport "cottage" Knickerbocker Group shepherded from idea to reality. Now with their selection as designer/contractor for DIY Network's Blog Cabin 2012, Knickerbocker Group will be receiving some well-deserved national attention.

For the uninitiated, Blog Cabin is not simply a television show; it is, according to the DIY website, "a groundbreaking multimedia experience based on a very simple idea: You Design It, We Build It, You Could Win It!" Basically, the "experience" consists of a major house renovation project, with some design features chosen by fans via internet voting, documented on both web and television. Specific aspects of the renovation are also featured as special episodes of DIY Network shows, such as "I Hate My Kitchen," "Indoors Out" and "Desperate Landscapes." Ultimately, "one lucky viewer" wins the renovated "cabin" through a simple lottery. Judging from the comments on its website, the show is wildly popular with its dedicated following.

In September, DIY Network announced that this year Blog Cabin would reinvent a circa 1880

farmhouse on 51 acres of waterfront property in Waldoboro. Steven Lerner, director of programming for DIY Network, explains why they chose Knickerbocker Group for this project.

"When we were looking for a builder, we were searching for several qualities, such as a great portfolio, wonderful recommendations, real craftsmen and of course, located in Maine. After meeting with some prospective builders, we were blown away by the Knickerbocker Group. They are true craftsmen and we totally clicked with Steve [Malcom, founder and owner] and Marcus [Golding, construction manager]. At DIY Network, we have a passion for building and home renovation and we could see that Knickerbocker Group does too."

For Knickerbocker Group, the project began last spring when they were selected by DIY and asked to evaluate several properties around Maine.

"We toured those properties and made recommendations and finally landed on one in Waldoboro," explains Malcom, and then adds with a laugh, "and now that we know what we know, I'm really happy it's close."

What they know now is how much "hand holding" it takes to renovate an old house and meet all the needs of television. While Knickerbocker is doing the work of designing and building, it also has to consider how that can be interwoven into six weeks of television.

"It's all about TV and so we have to shift our thinking and the way we do things," notes Malcom.

Shifting his way of thinking may come easier for Golding, who began his career building sets for film and television and is familiar with the demands of the medium. "There are milestones that they want to capture," explains Golding, who coordinates regular filming with a New Hampshire-based film crew, as well as managing overall construction. "The way it rolls out on TV, they will shoot through the entire remodeling . . . and take that footage and create a one-hour special that will run next fall."

Specific Blog Cabin construction projects will also be featured on five of DIY Network's regularly-aired shows. For each of these, "they bring in their own production team and talent and the show really focuses on their host," said Golding.

"What's important for them . . . is that we provide these opportunities for projects that the hosts will come and do."

If that isn't enough to consider, "HGTV Remodels," a new website associated with HGTV, is using Blog Cabin construction for six special topic web videos. Golding admits that coordinating all the filming while staying on construction target can be overwhelming at times.

"That's when I step in," says Malcom, who at times insulates his staff from production overload.

Another novel consideration that Blog Cabin brings is what Malcom laughingly refers to as "the crazies." The crazies are the dedicated fans of Blog Cabin, who not only gush online over design details but also long to win the property.

Kim Tuttle, architect, notes, "They knew the address, location, Google maps, the history of the property, everything, within an hour of posting the first picture." Tuttle adds that there are 8-9 million Blog Cabin viewers and that every Blog Cabin post can expect 2,000 or so viewer comments.

At the moment, "the crazies" are merely cyber-stalking Blog Cabin and Knickerbocker Group, but come summer and fall they are expected to arrive in droves for a closer look.

"The crazies haven't really come out yet," said Malcom, "but as we get closer and closer to the time they are going to give it away, apparently people drive from all over the country . . . They warned us that it's going to be nuts with all these people driving in and out and expecting to look through the place."

For Knickerbocker Group, the project's focus on Maine, its culture and craftsmen, transcends all the TV hoopla.

"They are really into locals, local culture, using local materials, salvage and found objects," noted Golding, while acknowledging that a lot of material is donated by national brands. "We wanted to replace all the windows," he adds, "They were talking to Andersen but we brought forward Mathews Brothers [Belfast] . . . they are the oldest window manufacturers in the country. We brought that story forward and they were interested . . . So now we're going to go forward with Mathews Brothers providing the windows and they are going to tour Mathews' facility for

the one hour special, as well."

Malcom says one of Knickerbocker Group's primary motivations for accepting this project is that it would be good for the local economy.

"Wouldn't it be nice to help put some money back into this area," he said. "These guys are going to spend money."

Golding adds, "There are so many people involved, all the layers of television. It's a huge crew."

All these people will be staying locally, eating locally, and probably buying some wicked neat Maine stuff. In addition to all the film crews, there will also be all the viewers who come to Midcoast Maine, specifically because of Blog Cabin.

The Blog Cabin announcement video could easily be confused for a Maine Department of Tourism piece and the show itself should further peak viewers' interest in all things Maine. Golding said he had TV appeal in mind when he chose his crew.

"The guys that I brought in first to do the demolition, they're real Maine characters . . . these are guys who take lunch and go to the back of their pickup trucks and pull out their Coleman stove and the frying pan and cook moose meat, potatoes and onions," said Golding.

Golding mimics the film crews' excitement and it's clear there will be some interesting local color for Blog Cabin.

"The production people they send are great folks. They're fun, they're interesting, they're interested," says Golding, who shares all the same attributes and can be expected to be an interesting feature of the show himself.

Online voting on specific design aspects begins in January and extends for six weeks. Tuttle, who has been working with a Blog Cabin interior designer, explains that viewers' choices will be limited to finish options that won't impede construction progress. Knickerbocker Group expects to be finished with all construction by mid-July. Blog Cabin shows should begin airing in late August/early September.

Malcom sums it up, "The angst we had going in was it's not really who we are. But we thought what the heck it will be fun."

And it should be. Follow Blog Cabin progress at diynetwork.com or knickerbockergroup.com.



diy BLOG CABIN COASTAL RETREAT

KNICKERBOCKER'S BLOG CABIN. Boothbay's Knickerbocker Group, whose name is synonymous with fine craftsmanship, has been chosen to design and renovate this farmhouse in Waldoboro for DIY Network's Blog Cabin 2012. Steven Lerner, director of programming for DIY Network, said that after considering other Maine builders, "we were blown away by the Knickerbocker Group." Courtesy of Knickerbocker Group



LOCAL TALENT. Steve Malcom, Knickerbocker Group owner and founder, is interviewed about Blog Cabin for a Scripps Network production. According to one blogger, "The film crew said he was a natural." Courtesy of Knickerbocker Group

Gas prices

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\$4 a gallon.

Epperson wrote, "Oil prices may provide the foundation, but gasoline will likely take off on its own merits. Gasoline futures, more than oil, drive prices at the pump. Gasoline prices usually are at their lows in the fourth quarter and peak between March and May, as refineries undergo maintenance and switch from winter to summer-grade gasoline. Further fueling the surge: the closure of a large refinery near Philadelphia and possible shutdowns of two more along the Delaware River . . . will push retail gasoline prices toward 2008 highs [in the northeast]."



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