

A portrait of a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing glasses, a light blue turtleneck sweater, and a dark suit jacket. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a light-colored wall with a decorative architectural element on the left.

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**Building
Dream Homes
For Success**

Building Dream Homes for Success

By Kate Richardson



Whether he is building luxury homes or making award-winning wine, Valentino Citton has one priority, to achieve the highest quality product for the best value. The stellar reputation of his company, Homes by Valentino, for providing unique and impressive custom homes at a good price reflects this priority. Established in 1984, the company provides professional and high quality custom home-building services. Valentino is a registered builder and works with Travelers Home Warranty (St-Paul). Since its launch, his company has built 130 custom homes. Each one is distinctive and finished with outstanding attention to detail and top quality materials.

Valentino started building custom homes in a way that shows the consistency of his approach. He had just finished building a house for himself in a new subdivision. It had been a labour of love for Valentino, building his dream home from the ground up. From the initial design to the finishing touches, he had made each decision carefully, weighing the look with the price of materials to ensure he got the best value for himself. He wanted an impressive, expensive look, without going over his budget.

The finished home immediately garnered attention from people looking at houses being built in the subdivision. In fact, Valentino was able to capitalize on a home-buying boom at the time. People were arriving in busloads directly from the airport to the new subdivision to look at homes. His home constantly attracted interest and Valentino was besieged with offers to buy. At first he

was not interested – this was his dream home after all – but eventually, a Realtor persuaded him to sell to his client. When the purchaser, who was from China, returned to finalize the papers, he brought his brother, who was so impressed by Valentino's home that he asked Valentino to build one just like it on his lot in Burnaby. Then the Realtor who had sold Valentino's home told him he had a client who also wanted Valentino to build him a house. "Before I knew it, I was building four houses right away, including another one for myself," Valentino says. "My business built from referrals from those four. Even today, 90% of my business is from referrals and repeat clients, just like when I started."

The majority of Valentino's clients are people who, like himself, want to build their dream homes. He especially enjoys working with these people, helping them achieve their goals. He is involved, as he was with his own home, from the beginning, guiding their decisions every step of the way from the design, layout, structure and engineering to interior design and landscaping. He uses his creativity and skills to build something exclusive for each customer. He draws from his extensive network of professionals and tradespeople, including architects, engineers, framers, electricians, plumbers, interior designers and landscapers to complete the homes. At any given time, besides his office staff, he may have as many as 50 people working on various projects for him. His ability to network and get the best out of people allows him to build houses on time and on budget all the time.

Building on his reputation for value, he advises his clients on design features or finishing products that could save money without sacrificing quality. "From the beginning to the end, I make my clients feel part of their own homes," Valentino explains. "I go through all the details with them, down to choosing tiles and paint colours. When the house is finished, they really feel as if they had built it themselves." When the homes are completed, they are so meticulously finished that all his clients have to do is pick up the key and move in.

Valentino builds homes all over Vancouver now, but mostly in west side neighbourhoods such as Shaughnessy, south Granville, Dunbar, Kerrisdale, Burnaby and north Burnaby. The homes that Valentino has built over the years have included fantastic features. Some have had indoor swimming pools; some have been huge (one was over 10,000 square feet), one had interior moldings covered in gold leaf. He also works with a developer from time to time, often building houses on a smaller scale, but with the same focus on providing top quality for good value. His reputation for excellence at a good price means that even during economic turmoil, he continues to build. He is currently working on seven houses, with four more starting next month. He has won each of the contracts through word of mouth.

Photography by Anita Wood, Portraits by Anita



Building on referrals from his first customers, most of Valentino's clients are Chinese. He has hired staff in his office who speak Cantonese and Mandarin. His entire website is available in English and Chinese. Valentino, who becomes friends with his clients, even speaks a few words of Chinese himself and has travelled to China often on their invitation.

Valentino's success comes from hard work, determination and lots of patience. He is also a natural problem-solver and can negotiate well on behalf of his clients. He started honing these skills in his native Italy, long before becoming a builder, when it took him six months to persuade his aunts to convince his father to allow him – the only son – to emigrate to Canada. He was only 19 years old.

Trained as a machinist, tool and die maker and welder, he immediately found work in construction when he arrived in Canada and gained construction experience that would be useful to him years later. Eventually, he landed a job in mechanical maintenance for a factory. After a year, he became shop steward and added to his skill at negotiation so well

that he was continually re-elected. His philosophy was based on reaching an agreement that was best for both the worker and the employer. "My experience as a union negotiator taught me how to negotiate the best deals with the wide variety of contractors I deal with today," Valentino says. "I have a strong sense of fairness because I always imagine myself in someone else's shoes. I don't want to make mistakes."

Valentino is also an excellent winemaker, carrying on in his tradition of always looking for the best value. He founded the Italian Canadian Winemaker Club in 1982 and is still an honorary member. He brought his willingness to work hard, patience and belief in value even to his hobby of winemaking. Wanting to take the guesswork out of winemaking, and intent on making good wine, he took a scientific approach after taking courses on winemaking at UBC. His method eliminated the guesswork prevalent in amateur winemaking at the time. Over the years, he has won many medals for his wine, both locally and nationally. He even became a judge of wines. His nose and tastebuds could discern subtle differences



in wine that left others amazed. (His nose can be a nuisance as well; he can often tell what his wife of 40 years, Diana, had for lunch as soon as he opens the door to his home!) He expanded his hobby into a wine importing business for a while, bringing in wine from Italy, France, Chile and Australia. He still makes wine regularly with a group of friends.

Although he will not call himself "the best," because he is always eager to learn more, his clients have no hesitation in giving Valentino kudos for his work. "Valentino paid attention to details that I did not even think of," says Philip W. "He gave me many choices and let me make my own decision." Vincent Co says, "It's been ten years since he built my house and I know I can still call on him if anything goes wrong." Wilkie Sia echoes the compliments. "I've been working with Valentino for many years," he says. "He's always professional and diligent."

Whether he's making wine or building houses, Valentino strives for –and achieves – a deceptively simple elegance, achieved only through attention to detail, hard work and patience.

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