

Kim Larson leads All Elements Design.Manage.Build in Kelowna, B.C. with her passion to transform dreams into bricks and mortar



Canadian Design and Construction Report special feature

Kim Larson's passion to transform dreams into bricks and mortar attracted her to an architectural career, then owning her own construction company. She now directs All Elements Design.Manage.Build in Kelowna, B.C.

Larson's interest in design and construction reached back to her childhood. She began working in local design firms at the age of 14. She completed her architectural technology degree at the University of California, also achieving an AutoCAD Technology certificate and an interior design minor.

She says despite the fact women often have the skills required for design – creativity and attention to detail – there were few women among her colleagues. “When I was in school there were only three women in my program,” she said. “Once I hit the workforce, I saw very few in the field.”

She says she felt early on she had to prove herself in the industry and a few comments fueled her desire to do exactly that. “One instructor told me it was hard for women to succeed in the industry and there was a contractor who told me I was just a girl so didn't know what I was talking about.”

She has proven her knowledge and skill.

Larson worked in California, Vancouver and Australia before returning to the Okanagan Valley. Here she pursued her dream of starting her own luxury residential construction company and All Elements was born.

“I love the entire realm of building. That, and the understanding things could be done differently is the reason for the company.”

Larson has sought to eliminate the difficulties associated with custom home design, including ineffective communication between architects and construction companies and inefficient relationships within the design, construction and client triangle.

She says in the early days the company consisted of herself, her colleague Stephan Ams and one tradesman. To get things done, Larson worked hands-on, doing what needed to be done. Now, the company is larger, employing between eight and 18. However, she remains in close contact with individual projects and clients.



"Instead of driving to sites we are working on, we set up a site trailer so we're there all day, every day," she said. "That's how mistakes are avoided; by having owners on the ground with every project."

Larson says some other contractor/owners visit their construction sites on a semi-weekly basis, leaving the work to subtrades and suppliers. She says that results in reactive problem solving instead of proactive solutions.

The company also completes framing and foundation work in-house to ensure quality.

Larson says she believes in establishing relationships that stand the test of time. She says she gets involved with and attached to clients. "Relationship building extends to trades and suppliers as well," she says. "We have people we've worked with for years who would go out of their way to help us because we treat them with respect and know them as people. These people also know what I expect so our customer benefits with a better end product."

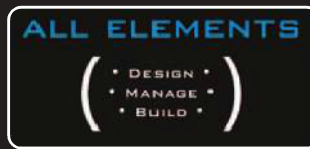
She says getting to know tradesmen and learning from their expertise has made her a better designer, builder and owner because she understands home building at the design, engineering and finishing stages.

"All aspects of this field are a bit of an obsession for me, from real estate investment, architecture and construction. I love designing and building a dream home from scratch and the look on the home owner's face when they see their dream become reality."

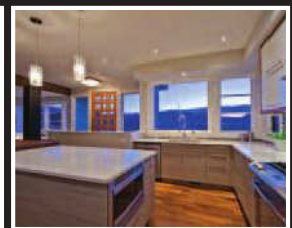
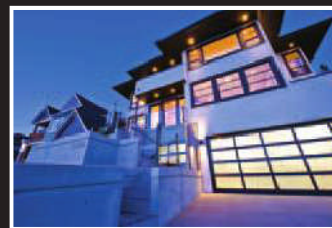
Larson speaks to architecture classes twice a year through the Kelowna Centre for Arts and Technology. She says there are many more women there than when she was a student 14 years ago.

"I am thrilled to see more women getting involved in the industry. They are about to embark on the most exciting ride they have ever been on."

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