Design/build...

for the high-end markets

The industry needs to...start telling our clients about their outdoor living spaces just like building architects tell them about indoor living spaces.’

—Gary Kinman

Last summer, on a whim, Gary Kinman bought a pony. It was a real miniature—tiny enough, he reckoned, to coax and shove into the family minivan and take home to the kids. Strawberry (the name Gary’s two children later gave it) rode to the Kinman household with its wet muzzle poking over Gary’s right shoulder.

The arrival of the pint-sized gray, with blond mane and tail, elicited the hoped-for response, delighted yelps from the kids and Gary’s two, huge yellow dogs. Never mind that the minivan no longer has that new-car odor.

Sometimes impulsive. Usually outspoken. Never boring. Kinman, 36, with his stocky, powerful build and square jaw, looks like a boxer. Or maybe a middle linebacker.

He’s really a pushover, though. A bonafide softie.

When he claims that his Kinman & Associates regularly designs and builds residential landscapes costing $250,000 and more, he can almost convince a listener that customers always get the better of him in the process. Shame on them.

“We have a reputation—which, I guess, isn’t necessarily good—for being expensive,” pleads Kinman. “We’re not expensive. For the product we deliver, we’re inexpensive—which I can prove by our financial statement.”

A handy market—Kinman’s K&A is located in quaint Dublin, Ohio. It’s a good town to be doing what Gary likes to do best, top-of-the-market residential landscape design and build.

Just outside of Dublin, which is itself just northwest of Columbus, is golfer Jack Nicklaus-built Muirfield Golf Course. It’s a gem, and site of his annual Memorial Tournament. In fact, Nicklaus’s new home will be going up nearby soon.

Kinman may or may not get the Nicklaus landscape. But it’s the type of residential project that K&A has earned an enviable national reputation for designing and building: the big residential job.

“A small project for us is in the $25,000 to $30,000 range. But I think even that’s a lot of money and we can do some really beautiful stuff with it,” says Kinman.

“Certainly we’d like to do more of that, but our problem as a company is that people in our market think, ‘Oh, my gosh, Kinman & Associates, they’re too expensive and they work on bigger projects.’”


“Actually, planting is one of the last things we usually do. There is so much more to the business than jamming a bunch of bushes next to a house. I think our industry pushes that too hard,” says Kinman. He calls the process “super shrubbing.”

“I think we (the industry) need to be putting in more beautiful, front sidewalks, designing home entries that work, installing stone walls that enhance properties. We’ve got to start telling our clients about their outdoor living spaces just like building architects tell them about indoor living spaces.”

One job at a time—Kinman figures K&A has put in over $30 million worth of...
Project managers Sharon Halldren, foreground, and Julie Taggart see big projects to completion, from initial design to planting.

landscape projects. That's a lot for his small operation that stays so close to home. "I think I almost have enough callouses to prove it," he says opening his rough, workman's hands.

Gary insists size doesn't preoccupy him though. It never did, not even when he decided to start a landscape business almost 14 years ago. He was studying business and finance at Ohio State University then. "By the time I was a senior, I already knew that I wanted a company to put in the best residential landscapes in the area," he says.

K&A, he insists, is doing just that, in large part, because K&A is a team effort, involving five project managers and supporting office and field crews—even Gary's wife Lori, who works the phones.

As soon as K&A gets a recommendation, Kinman builds a team to work with the client and building architect. Gary's always on the team, along with a project manager. He says he deals with the bigger client picture, the concept, while the project managers do the actual designs and track construction details.

"I'm kind of associated with every job. I wish I wasn't as much," Kinman admits.

Everyone's busy—Actually, each of the five project managers (three men and two women) may have a dozen landscape projects bubbling at once. They guide each through a 22-step process. They can tell at a glance where each project stands because all are recorded on a huge, white board on the wall in front of their drawing boards.

"We're trying to develop a system where each job will have an on-site project manager as well as an in-house project manager," says Kinman. "Then, everything that we're doing on a project—from the beginning design to the end of the job—is being looked at by two people."

When operational, Kinman thinks this system will meet his clients needs even more precisely.

Then, he insists, his clients will get an even bigger bargain.

"The money they spend with us is like money they invest and get high interest on," he claims.

—Ron Hal