

# SAME TREE,



Brothers Roscoe (left) and Brook Klausing started maintaining landscapes at a young age alongside their father, Bob, who was a city landscape supervisor. Right: A young Brook Klausing assists his father with pruning.

# different branches

**T**alking to the Klausing brothers is like addressing two sides of the same brain.

On the left is the oldest, Roscoe Klausing, 37, president and CEO of Klausing Group, a \$2.8 million commercial grounds maintenance firm in Lexington, Ky. He's genuine.

Logical. A planner. On the right side younger brother Brook Klausing, 36, owner of \$1.5 million, New York City-based Brook Landscape, is an artistic risk taker.

Their mutual passion for beautifying environments and business success sprouted from the same seed. It's rooted in the same soil in Lexington, where they grew up the sons of a city landscape supervisor and a registered nurse. They cultivated it together as young men, first to earn spending money and then as a true business. But today, the branch each brother has chosen is very different.

"Even though Brook has the design/build company and I've got the grounds management company, we both are really big fans of design," Roscoe Klausing says. "It inspires us both and it comes out in different ways."

## → GETTING THERE

It's fall 1997 and 20-year-old Roscoe Klausing hits the road in his 1992 Honda Accord to head back to Earlham College in Richmond, Ind., from Lexington.

He just spent the long, fall-break weekend of his first year of college in his hometown, helping his younger brother with the landscape business the pair built steadily since they

were in tenth and eighth grades, respectively. In fact, they'd been cutting grass and doing jobs around their neighborhood for much longer than that.

"I'm driving back, and I'd just worked 50 or 60 hours helping Brook get caught up because he was so behind," Roscoe Klausing recalls. "I said to myself, 'What am I doing?' I should be back there with Brook and the business."

On that very car ride he decided he was done with school.

He completed the semester, but before it was over began negotiating a lease for an office and warehouse so the budding company, Klausing Lawn Mowing, could move out of the family garage.

By summertime, the co-owners joined the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), now part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). They attended the annual meeting in Baltimore in 1999, the predecessor to today's Green Industry Conference.

"It was there I saw what was possible," Roscoe Klausing says. "I was introduced to people who were entrepreneurs first and who happened to be in the world of landscape contracting."

Soon after the brothers began working on—and executing—a business plan. By 2001 they replaced all of their residential maintenance, design/build and bid/build work for commercial maintenance contracts. At the time they were doing about \$400,000 in revenue. They also rebranded the company to Klausing Group.

"Because we only had about a dozen people at the most, we chose Klausing Group," Roscoe Klausing says. "We realized we needed to project an image to give

people confidence, so we came out with a very, I think, classic-looking logo and a name that might lead people to believe we were much larger than we were."

The move to 100 percent maintenance was a better fit for the older Klausing, though.

"Commercial grounds maintenance suited me better than Brook," Roscoe Klausing says. "This wasn't the sexy side of the industry or it wasn't the one everyone wanted to be in, like it is today."

That same year, just before Sept. 11, Brook Klausing went on a week-long vacation to New York.

"There was an energy here that blew me away that I didn't ever feel in Kentucky," Brook Klausing says of New York. Upon his return home, his mind was made up that he'd move. The brothers immediately began planning to transition him out of the business. He relocated to New York the following year.

## → RIGHT BRAIN

Soon after arriving in New York, Brook Klausing landed landscape maintenance work for a short time and then quit the

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*What started as a sibling lawn mowing endeavor for the Klausing brothers has grown into two distinct and thriving landscape businesses.*

BY **MARISA PALMIERI**

PHOTOS: REBECCA FRAZER, KLAUSING FAMILY



## DIFFERENT BRANCHES

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industry for a few years. It was during an internship at an architecture firm he put the pieces together.

“That’s when I learned carpentry and realized construction and architecture were the missing link between me enjoying where I came from,” he says. “I learned how to design and produce projects—I hadn’t done that before. I was strictly dirt, plants and maintenance for so many years.”

In 2006, Brook Klausung founded landscape design/build and management firm Brook Landscape and has grown it to about \$1.5 million in 2013 with 15 employees. The company designs, constructs and manages urban gardens with “classic materials in a contemporary way” with a variety of methods, including carpentry, masonry and steel fabrication. Brook Klausung also is a licensed general contractor.

The company is booked through the end of 2014 and is recruiting so it can add capacity and accept work in other locations, such as Los Angeles. It also plans to advance its growth prospects by subcontracting out construction services, focusing on serving as a general contractor for those and by expanding its horticulture management division.

“(Horticulture) is the reason clients call us,” he says. “It’s the finished product, the icing on the cake, so I want it to

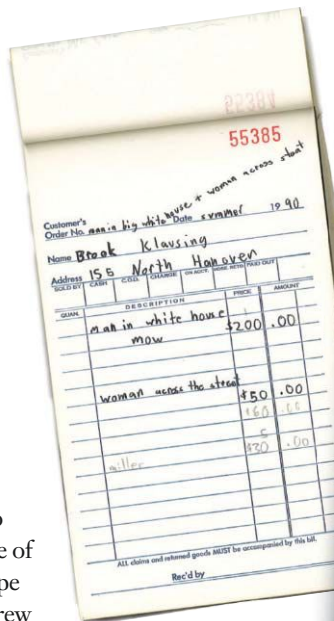
be as strong as possible.”

Growing a design/build firm seems like work enough, but Brook Klausung also manages a second career—that of a fashion model. He was “discovered” about five years ago when he landed one of his first big landscape design jobs for J. Crew Creative Director Jenna Lyons. After the project, she asked him to be in a J. Crew photo shoot featuring “real guys,” and he’s picked up other modeling jobs from there.

Though reluctant to talk about his modeling career, which he described to Details.com as “a great way to meet amazing people and earn extra cash,” the benefits of his artistic side job are not lost on the younger Klausung, who’s largely self taught as a designer.

“Working with other designers and creative directors has been and still is amazing,” he says. “It’s more like a collaboration and I’m the interpreter.”

Not to mention the who’s-who aspect of the modeling industry. “From a net-



Roscoe Klausung saved some receipts and fliers from the brothers’ first foray into business.



working standpoint, it’s good to know taste makers, trendsetters and the folks that report on what’s happening,” he acknowledges.

Knowing the reporters has done Brook Klausung some good. The PR he’s gained as a model/landscape designer is the only form of marketing he’s ever pursued, he says. He’s been featured in the *New York Times*, *Garden Design* and *Delta’s Sky*, among other media outlets.

“I don’t do any advertising; I only do press,” he says. “I could do (advertising), but my growth rate is stunted by the ability to produce, not the amount to sell.”

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Roscoe (left) and Brook Klausung pose with the sign from their first business, which evolved into Klausung Group.

# Inspiration INTO ACTION

Some things have changed at Klausung Group over the years. One that hasn't: the company's commitment to community stewardship.

Going back to when the Klausung brothers wrote their first business plan, Roscoe Klausung says the company always has tried to be "a good corporate citizen."

"I wanted to give back on a regular basis without having to think about it," he says, noting he got the idea to set aside a portion of the company's earnings from Patagonia. The outdoor clothing and gear brand pledges 1 percent of sales to preserving and restoring the environment through its 1% For The Planet program.

Initially, Klausung Group followed suit, committing 1 percent of top-line revenue toward providing services to local nonprofits with grounds maintenance needs. Eventually the company changed its program to 5% For The Community, setting aside 5 percent of net profit to the same cause.

"We sign a contract with the organizations to take over their grounds," Klausung says. "We do the contract so they know we're serious. Technically, they're one-year contracts, but we've never stopped doing work for anybody."

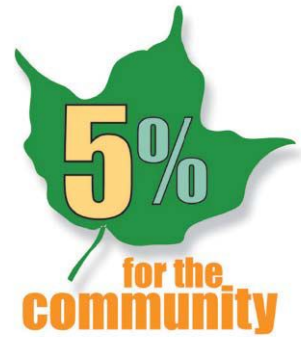
Today, the program maintains about six sites, including a food bank.

It's successful in its simplicity, Klausung says. "Our staff, in many cases, doesn't even know when it's working on a site that's a donation," he says.

There has been one hiccup: One recipient acquired another facility, increasing the size of its grounds from one acre to 15 acres. Klausung Group committed to letting this organization be a repeat recipient of the award for the next few years so it can continue service.

Each annual contract has a value of about \$20,000, Klausung says, tallying the program's lifetime giving near \$200,000.

"I'd so much rather do community service this way than every six months to rally troops on a Saturday," he says. "I'd rather be able to plan for it and know what our expenses are going to be instead of donating whenever we're asked."



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## DIFFERENT BRANCHES

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As it turns out, there are many barriers to growing a landscape business in New York City, not the least of which are labor and material costs. Though, those aren't the things that plague Brook Klausings the most.

"It's the red tape involved in architecture and construction in New York versus an area like Lexington," he says. "In New York, you can't do anything without someone saying 'stop' or 'you owe us money.'"

The highly regulated atmosphere also creates a lot of stop and go for Brook Landscape. "You can get a stop-work order from a building inspector from an anonymous phone call," he says. "You have to be involved in enough opportunities to constantly have the ability to switch over to another project."

That's not always easy for someone who describes himself as "impatient." Brook Klausings estimates his jobs take twice as long as a comparable job would

take in a suburban market. An average design/build project takes a few months but could drag on for a year.

"You have to have a trick up your sleeve all the time," he says. "It's having consistent flexibility and problem-solving skills."

### →LEFT BRAIN

For Roscoe Klausings, the differences between his and his brother's businesses are most outwardly evident in their facilities.

"He has a warehouse in Brooklyn; it's largely a design studio in one section and a fabrication facility in the other," Roscoe Klausings says. Then, he describes his digs, chuckling: "I've got 2 acres that would be worth millions of dollars in Brooklyn."

How each brother sells his services also shows the distinction between them.

"I find that much of what my brother sells in New York City is a

### » WEB EXTRA

Ever read *Growing Dreams* by Jim Paluch? Visit [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) to learn about how the Klausings inspired the book's characters.



personal relationship with him," he says. "He's a hip, fashionable guy. He's providing something that's quite unique and that very

few people can do. A lot of people can do what Klausings Group does, and we have to figure out a way to set ourselves apart. It's a different approach."

Roscoe Klausings has found a way to make Klausings Group stand out with its systems-oriented approach to caring for customers and the community (see "Inspiration into action," page 23).

The company grossed about \$2.8 million in 2013 and is budgeted for the same in 2014, though after this winter's windfall

## Oh, BROTHERS



### ROSCOE KLAUSINGS

*President and CEO  
Klausings Group  
Lexington, Ky.*

65% commercial grounds management; 35% design/build and bid/build work for those accounts  
**2013 revenue:** \$2.8 million

#### →Roscoe on...

**Brook:** "I had no idea he

had it in him to do what he's doing right now, doing the projects he's doing and working with clientele he works with."

**Their early days:** "I still have some of the first invoices we gave to customers where we differentiated \$3 to cut the back lawn or \$2 to cut the front."

**Company that inspires him:** Patagonia

**What's next?** Klausings Group opened a new branch an hour away in Louisville, Ky. "At this point it's more of a satellite production facility than a branch," he says. "We have one seven-man crew based in Louisville. The hope would be that it will be operating as a proper branch within two years."

**Moonlights as:** Husband to Elizabeth McLaren and father to 5-year-old Sara.

### BROOK KLAUSINGS

*Owner and creative director  
Brook Landscape  
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Design/build and management firm, primarily for residential accounts  
**2013 revenue:** About \$1.5 million

#### →Brook on...

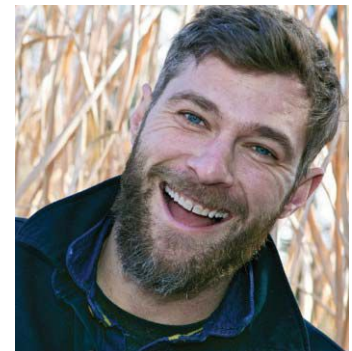
**Roscoe:** "He's a smart, talented fair individual ruled by ethics and idealism. He's the type of person I'd want to do business with."

**Their early days:** "I've cut enough lawns to make me want to puke."

**Companies that inspire him:** "BDDW and Italian designer Paola Lenti both make amazing furniture and have great brand identity. I'm inspired by designers that push the envelope but don't look like they're trying too hard."

**What's next?** By the end of 2014, he'll launch Natural Workshop, a line of outdoor living products. "It's a slow start but I'm very excited to create products that I want to use."

**Moonlights as:** A model for brands such as J. Crew, among others. Was featured in holiday TV commercial for MasterCard.





Klausing Group changed all of its business over to commercial grounds maintenance in the early 2000s.

intimate space with custom planter boxes and potted trees and shrubs.

“We have different strengths, which is really evident in the companies we have today,” Roscoe Klausing says, acknowledging the brothers had trouble finding ways to complement their strengths when they were partners. “I’ve seen the work Brook does. It’s the exact opposite side of

the industry of what I do. Our personalities really reflect that, too.”

Brook Klausing thinks back to the days of the original business in Kentucky.

“Here’s the difference between Roscoe and I,” he says. “I could get clients and he could produce.

“If we were ever partners again, we’d kill it.” **LM**

Roscoe Klausing expects to exceed that. (The company met its snow budget for 2014 on Jan. 15.)

To get a taste of the older Klausing’s methodical approach to business, listen to him describe an internal analysis of addressing client callbacks, which became a problem in September 2012.

“We realized at a strategic planning meeting that one of the main characteristics of our company—response time—had become a weakness,” he says. “We doubled down and made an internal commitment to resolve every single customer issue within 48 hours, no matter what. We started tracking it from when we noticed the issue or when the customer called in with one. It could be anything from an incorrect invoice to a tree planted in the wrong place.”

The leadership team devised a procedure to route all customer calls into the same location. There’s now a protocol for taking the customer call, which is logged into a system and pushed out to an account manager, who promptly calls the client for instructions. Once the conflict is resolved on the production end, the person who accepted the phone call follows up with the client to ensure it’s been taken care of to satisfaction.

“Closing that loop was really important,” Roscoe Klausing says, sharing the average issue is now resolved in 24 hours. “We’ve seen better contract renewal. Although I don’t have a way to connect that to issue resolution, we’ve had customers say, ‘You guys were on chopping block because we were so fed up with response time.’ We tell them we call 2012 a blip.”

#### → DISTINCT STRENGTHS

The same satisfaction in Roscoe Klausing’s voice as he describes overcoming the “blip” surfaces when his brother describes transforming a rooftop garden into an

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