

## If you build it

Carpentry projects have led one New Jersey company to launch a new division.

**D**OING THE OCCASIONAL pergola or deck project for some of his landscape clients led Simon Darlington, owner of Darlington Designs in Glassboro, N.J., to launch an entire carpentry division for his landscape company. Though he knows it's a bit of an unusual service for a landscape company to offer, the strong reputation for quality and craftsmanship he's built on projects completed so far has allowed that division to grow and thrive. In fact, Darlington has now hired three full-time crew members to handle the carpentry work.

During college, Darlington says he worked for a custom home builder, spawning his interest in carpentry. When he started his landscape business in 2003, he offered small carpentry projects—like pergolas—if homeowners requested them. His business blossomed from there as clients began asking for more. In 2007, Darlington launched a separate carpentry division. He calls the service "wood construction" on his website,

and it encompasses just about anything a general contractor does. Darlington says the division grew organically.

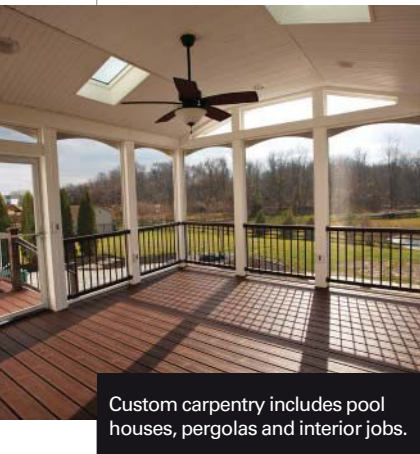
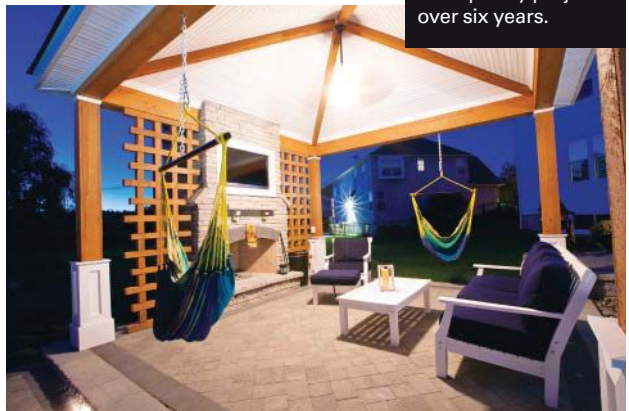
"As the work grew, I hired an employee to work on that division—then another—and now we're up to a crew of three full-time workers," Darlington says. "All they do is custom carpentry, which has included everything from pool houses and cabanas to interior work like hardwood flooring or trim work. We don't always go out and look for those jobs—they often just happen naturally."

The carpentry division of Darlington's business has even handled roofing, siding and small additions. Darlington says it's getting to the point where customers are hiring him because of the carpentry offering.

Darlington says the company had to prove itself in the field.



Darlington Designs has built a portfolio of carpentry projects over six years.



Custom carpentry includes pool houses, pergolas and interior jobs.

"We've been doing the carpentry work for about six years and the first three were a little slow," Darlington says. "As a landscape company we don't look like carpenters, so we had to slowly build a portfolio as jobs came along, which proved we were really good at doing this, too."

As the division has grown, Darlington says it's been a substantial investment. Carpentry tools are not cheap and Darlington also had to purchase an additional box truck. Still, he says the investment in those tools are cheaper than the construction equipment needed for outdoor landscape projects. He adds that he's been able to recuperate the cost relatively quickly as carpentry projects often can produce a nice profit.

Recently Darlington has begun marketing the carpentry division as its own entity.

"We're doing specific brochures and using our website to showcase that division," he says.

One of the biggest benefits of adding the division has been the year-round work it produces. In fact, he started this division in part to generate winter work for his staff.

"We've been increasingly able to accomplish that as the division has grown. It's something I'm very proud of," he says. "We try to get some interior work lined up for the winter, and that gives us an extra 12 weeks a year where we can generate revenue. We're even able to use some of our landscape crew members when we're doing a carpentry project that requires extra hands."

Payton is a freelance writer with eight years of experience writing about the landscape industry.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** Darlington Designs

**LOCATION:** Glassboro, N.J.

**EMPLOYEES:** 17

**SERVICE:** Custom carpentry division

**COST TO INVEST IN A CARPENTRY DIVISION:** Approximately \$30,000

**YEARS TO RECOUP INVESTMENT:** Three to five