

Maine Home

July 2011

Winner of a 2010 Folio Eddie Award

+DESIGN

Home for the
Summer

On the **Beach**
On the **Coast**
On the **Farm**

July 2011

\$5.95

0 7>



0 74470 28888 6

Maine Home +DESIGN

75 Market Street

Suite 203

207-772-3373

www.mainehomedesign.com

If whole or part of this article is reproduced online, we ask that
a link back to MaineHOME+DESIGN be placed. Thank you.



BUILDING A REPUTATION

How does a young builder from away break into the well-established, tight-knit local building community? **Kevin Lord will tell you.** >

Growing up in Chicopee, Massachusetts, Kevin Lord was always lucky. In fact, he earned a reputation for it.

On every high school snow day, he and his friends met up to play nickel poker—with predictable results. “Whenever there was money involved, I always won,” Lord says today, as if he still can’t believe it himself. “My friends would razz me. But I won every card game we had and every raffle I entered.”

If luck is the residue of design, Lord didn’t just end up as one of the most influential builders in the Kennebunks. He studied carpentry and cabinetry in high school and spent seven years honing his craft with one of the most reputable custom builders in western Massachusetts. He then set out to build a reputation for quality and honesty. “There’s a line between being a builder/craftsman and simply a businessman—you can’t just go all businessman. I’ve seen it: they develop their reputation and then start putting less and less into their houses, and more and more into their pockets.”

One of the houses Lord helped build in Massachusetts was for Kevin Thomas (now the publisher of this magazine, along with *Maine* magazine). When Thomas later decided to renovate a house in Kennebunkport, he called Lord again, and the two became fast friends. Before long, Lord sold everything back home and moved to Maine to strike up a partnership called Welcome Back Cottages. Thomas marketed and managed the business,



while Lord built the team and relationships in the field. High-end spec houses eventually gave way to custom homes. And, in early 2011, Lord bought out his partner’s share in their business, which they had named Thomas and Lord. “Rarely does somebody buy someone out and it ends well,” Lord says. “But our relationship is rock solid.”

In fact, Lord’s close friendships with nearly everyone he has worked with may help explain why he is so busy (and beloved) on both sides of the river. His current projects include most of the cottages and houses on Kennebunk’s Sea Grass Lane and twenty luxury cottages in the new southern Maine resort Hidden Pond, which he is building for friend and developer Tim Harrington. Harrington is well known in Maine and Miami for his luxury, big-idea

Kevin Lord (previous page) spends his days—including most Saturday mornings—meeting with clients, subcontractors, and investors.

Lord has built a team of craftspeople with whom he works on nearly every job. They know the quality he expects, so they can spend their time brainstorming creative problems—and making notes on studs in Sharpie markers (this page).

Opposite, clockwise from top left: This luxurious spec home became a custom project when the Boston client bought it during construction.

True to Lord's fine carpentry roots, handcrafted cabinetry and trim work are his favorite part of building well-appointed cottages, no matter their size.

The waterfront locations of many of Lord's projects require careful siting to maximize views and meet codes.

Kevin?
What can we cut 2/6
Built in outlets

projects, and he doesn't do many up here without help from Lord.

"I've been building in Kennebunkport for twenty years, and he's the best builder I've ever worked with," Harrington says. "He cares about the end result. There are a thousand decisions to make when you're managing a project, and he always makes them well. He innately knows the right way to do it. He has the eyes of an artist. All that—and he's an old soul." In fact, the unflappable Lord is only 35 years old.

Hidden Pond is but one stop on Lord's daily rounds to his company's various projects.

On a recent morning, he drove his dusty gray pickup to an oceanfront second home to show Boston-based designer Justine Spaulding some new windows and walls. He was flexible when they decided, together, to rearrange plumbing fixtures in an upstairs bathroom, and he was sure enough to mark changes on the floor with a thick black Sharpie. He stored the remaining details in his uncanny memory.

That memory comes in handy while he fields dozens of phone calls on his Blackberry about myriad works in progress. So does his great eye for proportion. "That's what makes all of the details come together to look perfect," he explains.

With his focus on quality and relationships, Lord has loyally kept a team of top subcontractors busy, day after day, for the past eight years. "It makes my life easier," he says. "They know the level of work we do, and I know I can count on them." With their help, Lord can spend more time with his wife, Kelly, and two young sons, Michael and Kyle. Their teamwork makes winning work—and helping

clients know what to expect—easier, too.

As soon as Lord gets a set of architectural plans, he makes ten copies of the blueprints. He distributes a copy to every subcontractor so he can provide an accurate quote based on the most detailed specs. "We can give clients a very clear price based on their exact drawings," Lord says. "And, if I make mistakes of my own or my guys miss something, we fix it and don't charge the client for the mistake." That's how he's built his reputation for honesty and quality.

Where beautifully appointed, energy-efficient new houses replace neglected old waterfront cottages, it's a challenge to make something work well in a small footprint. But, for Lord, that's the whole point. Built-in cabinetry, interior moldings, mahogany ship's ladders, and other thoughtful interior details make a Maine cottage something entirely different from the houses he helped build in western Massachusetts.

And the details of his charmed life—family, friends, partners, and thriving business—are what make living here so satisfying.

"I love the challenge of figuring out how we can we make a house work and look great," Lord says. "I just love cottage design. Even though there's a lot of detail, it's just clear and solid."

Lucky for Lord, Mainers do, too.

MH+D

For more information, see Resources on page 111.

THOMAS & LORD:
207-351-5733, THOMASANDLORD.COM

