



## Schlauch-Bottcher Construction takes lead in a demanding housing market

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General Contractors learn the art of coming up for mountain air as they ride the tidal wave of home building that hasn't yet crested in Montana. In 2003 construction employment in Gallatin County made up 12% of all private employment, compared to 7% statewide, according to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. Additionally, the National Association of Realtors reveals that existing home sales in 28 states declined from second quarter 2005-2006. Montana is among the states still on the rise. As more people fortify the new American dream of wilderness and western living, Schlauch-Bottcher Construction (SBC) strives to meet these needs with uncompromising quality.

Starting from scratch, or rather kindling, SBC has rapidly grown their team and their portfolio since 1996. The first of four

partners, Chad Bottcher, joined by his father Jim Bottcher, built their initial spec home in Bozeman. Consistent with their subsequent work, this home spared no detail and stands to showcase the beginning of a handsome career. Expanding his familiarity with Gallatin County during his years at Montana State University, C. Bottcher had the chance to watch the area wake beneath the influx of second home owners and nature lovers. He predicted both short and long term growth, and he was right. While the United States population grew 5.3% from 2000-2005, Gallatin County grew 15.3%.

C. Bottcher partnered with Michael Schlauch in 1997. Also attending MSU, Schlauch's degree in Construction Engineering complemented Bottcher's degree in Architecture. Bottcher's brother Jamie, graduated from MSU in 1998 and completed the four man partnership at SBC. The business flourished quickly with the partnership in place. When asked about the momentum of their growth Jamie Bottcher says, "We got the false hope that

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we could go big, when each of us thought the other one knew what he was doing." Humility aside, the partners also concur that coming to work every day is easy, due to the singularity of each project. "Diversity might be our strongest attribute. We build unique homes because they are custom homes, and every client has a different vision."

The burgeoning housing market dictates the scope of residential construction, and SBC has established a niche with distinct work that attracts quality craftsmen. Second homes account for 60-70% of SBC's portfolio. SBC credits the dedicated crew of carpenters for much of their success. They aspire to grow this competent team in pace with the demands of a growing community.

Schlauch admits that competition for the best carpenters is high. "I believe that there are a number of contractors making sacrifices in terms of the amount of work they take on and the schedule of their work due to the shortage of skilled construction workers. One indicator is the number of want ads in the classified section of the local papers. I have counted as many as 70 ads on occasion under the construction heading." SBC employs their share of workers – now 125 strong – putting them among the Montana Department of Labor and Industry's Top 20 list of private employers in Gallatin County. In less than ten years they have become an employment resource.

The US Department of Labor reports: Montana has one of the top five concentrations of carpenters in the United States, as of May 2005. This data coincides with Department of Labor and Industry for Montana who disclose that construction of buildings is among the five fastest growing Montana industries. The Department also project a 43.8% change for the period 2002-2012. Jamie Bottcher appreciates the shift in focus, compelled by the boom. "We are seeing more and more people joining this business as a career, and many of them have evolved with us because they love the work."

Success as a General Contractor comes through the fusion of many parts. Most people don't understand, or consider, the sheer amount of people and materials it takes to build a home. The layman worries about carpeting, bathtubs, doors and fireplaces. Meanwhile, a General Contractor orchestrates a fluctuating symphony of plumbers, electricians, equipment operators, roofers, masons, finishers, sanders, glaziers, setters, tapers, plasterers, layers, installers, workers and helpers.

As projects crescendo toward finale, SBC may sub-contract many of these aforementioned jobs to trusted colleagues. Not so with wood-working. Carpenters are their forte, and SBC performs all carpentry aspects of a project with their hand-picked team. A warm body and a hammer aren't enough. C. Bottcher recognizes that high standards distinguish their company. "This business is a pride thing. We've each worked in it and through it. We hire only craftsmen."

A distinguished team means SBC possesses a flair for the unique. Each client presents a singular vision for their dream home, and SBC matches best with those who have a high regard to quality and detail. The SBC portfolio now extends from Whitefish through Bozeman and Big Sky. Belonging to a diverse clientele of second home owners, the majority of their homes are in a 60 mile radius of Bozeman.



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Rapport is just as important as portfolio when shopping for a general contractor to build a dream home. As SBC literally builds the community, they enjoy establishing friendships, not just partnerships. Dwight and Lois Short appreciate SBC's caring and collaborative efforts. "SBC's attention to detail and their insistence on construction excellence gave us a home of which we are truly proud. Everyone in the company was dependable, courteous, and had our best interests in mind at all times. It was a pleasure to work with them from the start."

The partners typically meet clients in their Bozeman office. Photos of trophy homes tempt the imagination from every square foot of the meeting room walls. Open beam ceilings, sculpted metal staircases, and framed picture windows take nesting to a new level. It's not surprising that one of the greatest challenges for many clients is aligning their dreams with their budgets. SBC takes this to heart, while never compromising craftsmanship.

With more than 100 homes under their tool belt, spanning a range of price points, they have learned that creativity is as important as hard skills. "We go for the WOW factor, and we love to tell a client we can pull it off." Says Chad, "We are proud of all of our work, that is the point, but when a client sees the product and gives their approval, that feels really good."

As further evidence of the value the partners give to past and present relationships, they recently took their high school shop teacher out for dinner, in thanks for introducing them to drafting. Certainly their employees feel the reward of working for such team players, and staff meetings tend to demand input from all of the Supervisors. With 10 supervisors overseeing 10-15 projects, simultaneously, each year, the Partners must trust their crew. Jamie speaks of the team with reverence. "When I look around the room at the amount of talent at that Supervisor meeting, I am impressed and feel lucky they have chosen us."

The Partners take their play time as seriously as their labor time and hope that this fun-loving attitude fosters a duly positive work environment. They initiated a Supervisor trip that unites the team in cities ranging from Phoenix, to San Diego, to Seattle. This year they will catch both a Bears and Cubs game in Chicago. Other first-class outings – compliments of SBC – have included professional sporting events, clay shooting, scuba diving, and deep sea fishing. Each summer SBC also hosts two, "Friends of SBC" Golf Tournaments, for their entire staff and many of their sub-contracting colleagues. These spirited employee benefits are just another excuse for SBC to cultivate a company community, applying the same cohesion and finesse they use to build a home.

As for the community at large, SBC's focus on home building keeps them in touch with Bozeman. In this vein, they are proud of their participation with another Bozeman staple, Eagle Mount, a non-profit that focuses on therapeutic recreation for people with disabilities and children with cancer. (Please see the side bar about Eagle Mount on this page). Showcasing their clever skill with custom homes they donated one-of-a-kind playhouses for Eagle Mount's Playhouse on Parade auction. For a miniature peek at SBC's work, one playhouse, fit only for the sincere appreciation of the youthful, resides at River Rock Elementary.

Job-seekers, potential home owners, or the curious will find a concentration of SBC homes at the Yellowstone Club and Moonlight Basin. Developments such as these indicate a changing Montana. When looking toward the future of this ever-growing state, SBC's adaptability, balance and diversity show us a custom model for success.

