



## *The Prince Home*

A 30,000-square-foot home in the style of a Tuscan villa, the Prince home in Potomac, MD is perhaps the most impressive project in Jeffco's portfolio. "Our company was totally immersed on the project for more than four years," Robins says.

The homeowners conceived of the style on a trip to Italy. "They saw these structures where multiple families had lived in a confederation of connected buildings that had been added on to over the course of 1,000 years," Easton says. "So the concept was that the home would be made to look like it had been built at different times in history by different people." One way Jeffco achieved this effect was by including nine different configurations of roof tile, with varied patterns and colors. Floors were imported from Italy, and the four fireplaces in the home were constructed to match the dimensions of antiques the Princes had seen in Italy. Of the 100 interior doors in the home, 50 were handmade by a master craftsman named Nick Bruford. The home also incorporated modern touches, like an elevator and an indoor pool with a swim jet.

"The Princes had very refined taste, and knew exactly what they wanted, so for us it was just a matter of making sure they got everything they wanted," Robins says. "It was one of a kind, not the kind of thing that could ever be replicated."

## Jeffco

FAMILY-OPERATED FIRM UNDERSTANDS THAT THERE'S MORE TO BUILDING A HOME THAN CONSTRUCTION

by David Hudnall

Budgeting, pricing, specifications: preconstruction services are not exactly the most thrilling aspect of the homebuilding business. But without careful planning, few of the sleekest, most progressive, most exciting projects would ever get off the ground. Plenty of projects over the years have been scrapped because clients designed far more than their budget could allow. "We consider our ability to organize together every piece of a construction project beforehand to be one of

our core strengths—something that really differentiates us," says Jeff Robins, founder of Jeffco, a Washington, DC-area development company. "It's a hard thing to do sometimes, bringing custom projects to fruition, and thorough planning is essential."

Robins' perspective on the subject is rooted in more than three decades of experience. After working summers building offices and hotels dur-

ing high school and college, he graduated from college in 1981 and began working in commercial construction. In 1985, when he was only 23 years old, he founded Jeffco. Today, the company specializes in custom residential new builds, as well as remodels and improvements. Robins says Jeffco is well known for both its exterior and interior work, as well as its ironwork. Its new builds average 9,000–10,000 square feet.

Jeffco is also known for being a family-operated business. Robins' son, Jared, who is 25, has begun the process of following in his father's footsteps; he's currently learning the business and preparing to one day lead it to new places. Jeffco's operations are based out of Robins' home, and his wife, Rena, performs all the bookkeeping and accounting. Robins believes that running a family-oriented outfit is ultimately beneficial for both the business and the community. "It means



*"[Having a family business] means you can more easily do the right thing for people; it means you can base decisions on personal commitments. It can be about more than building a home."*

*JEFF ROBINS, OWNER & PRESIDENT*

you can more easily do the right thing for people; it means you can base decisions on personal commitments," he says. "It can be about more than building a home."

Of course, much of the business is about building homes, and Robins' director of construction, Tom Easton, leads Jeffco's team of seven employees on jobs that vary widely. A 2004 master bath in Bethesda, Maryland required cooperation with a high-fashion interior designer; a 2005 McLean, Virginia custom residence, modeled after a Mediterranean-style villa, featured ornamental rail details, barreled roof tiles, stucco exterior, large, ornate coach lights, and stained garage doors; and a Potomac, Maryland family room, delivered in 2003, was inspired by a French Country aesthetic. "It featured stained beams and trusses, oversized windows and doors, custom cabinetry, character-grade walnut floors, and an inglenook fireplace," Robins adds.

Jeffco has received a variety of awards over the years, notably an Outstanding honor at the Washington Spaces 2009 Design Competition. The company

is also a member of organizations like the National Association of Home Builders (and the corresponding NAHB Green Building Program), the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, the Building Industry Association, and the BBB. Membership in these organizations can make a difference in lean times, and indeed, the market for new custom homes has fallen off in the Washington, DC suburbs in recent years. Where the company once would work on two-to-four new builds a year, that number is down between one and two these days. To pick up the slack, Jeffco has been concentrating on the remodeling side of its business. In 2009, it took on 25 remodeling projects—kitchens, baths, and some condos.

Currently, Robins continues to evolve Jeffco. The company has done some light commercial work, and he hopes his son may one day move the business more towards the commercial sector. In the meantime, Robins is confident about the market turning up again. "New homes are coming back, but slowly," he says. "There's a little more interest these days. All of a sudden the phone is starting to ring again." ■