

# forged by family

More than half a century in business and almost as long with HIA, the success of this Victorian-based builder comes down to strong family connections and a commitment to quality construction, big or small.

Story: Ian Bushnell

How does a building firm not just survive but thrive for 50 years in an industry so susceptible to economic shoals and headwinds?

For Melbourne's Noy Builders, it's about a diversity of skills, quality work, reputation, family culture and continual learning.

That, and not overextending itself but maintaining steady growth to stay in control of one's destiny.

Noy Builders has ridden the highs and lows of the Australian economy and the changing faces of the building industry since 1971 when Rene Noy left Hillcrest Homes to found his own company. He concentrated on renovations and extensions, with wife Marlies taking care of all the bookwork in the days when everything was done with paper and pen.

In a sense not much has changed. The core of the business remains renovations and extensions, although it will complete houses and unit blocks.

But Rene's three sons – Paul, Greg and Ronald – have taken the business into bespoke territory, embraced the energy efficiency and sustainability demands of the modern era, and a more discerning clientele.

Paul says none of the brothers had any doubts about joining the business after completing their apprenticeships. He pays tribute to how his father opened the way for them to take the reins, bringing fresh ideas and energy to the company.

'Dad was very gracious in how he stepped away, leaving us with the business, and that wouldn't have been an easy thing for somebody to do,' he says. 'I think that gave me the confidence, as well as the opportunity, to move forward.'

All three are directors but have their own specialist roles within the firm.

Older brother Paul has fallen into management, Greg focuses on the carpentry while Ronald is the creative force behind the firm's cabinetry and craftsmanship in kitchen and bathroom renovations.

The family connections don't stop there. Nephew Shane did his apprenticeship with the business and is now an experienced and qualified carpenter supervising other apprentices. Cousin Wendy runs the office, assisting to manage projects with everything that entails to stay ahead of the onsite work. She is helped in accounts by Ivon, a cousin-in-law.

The company relies on word of mouth and recommendations, maintaining a solid client base that return again and again. It has won a reputation for producing customised work that is out of the ordinary and unique to meet their clients' needs, such as a recent Brunswick renovation that graced the pages of Australian lifestyle magazine *Home Beautiful*.

Noy Builders updated an ageing bungalow while retaining its essential character, featuring bespoke joinery and cabinetry made in its own factory, including spectacular herringbone timber benchtops.

'We used to stick to the very basic but now what we do varies broadly,' Paul says.

That includes giving owners more choice about their inclusions, for example, not just standard taps or tiles. This is in response to the more sophisticated demands from today's clients, Paul says.

Noy Builders, with its wide range of skills within the company, and a reliable and trusted set of quality sub-trades, is ideally placed to complete a variety of jobs and deliver outstanding results.

The in-house capacity means the company can fall back on its own skill base if times get tough.

It also allows the company to be open to innovation. One example is a reverse brick construction project in Ringwood East that is an energy-efficient, all-electric home powered by rooftop solar (its owners are yet to pay a bill after four or five years). With a distinctive design, it's a showcase home for Noy Builders, collaboratively brought to life by yet another family connection: an up-and-coming nephew designer.

'That [project] was quite an achievement. When you're working with something a bit different it takes a lot of nutting out,' Paul says.

The company has stayed open to new ideas, whether it is bringing in coaching for staff, catching the latest webinar or undertaking HIA's training to meet the 7-star energy rating requirements.

Energy efficiency is a very important area, says Paul, although he admits the cost can be a factor for some clients. 'It's worthwhile going that extra step and I would definitely recommend it in whatever ways they can [afford] it, whether it's just double-glazed windows or upgrading insulation,' he says.

For as long as Paul can remember Noy Builders has had apprentices, and they currently have several at different stages of their training. Many have gone on to start their own businesses and have successful careers in the industry.

'We generally take them right through their apprenticeship, and especially with our business, they get a wealth of experience because we do so many different things,' Paul says. 'I think that's really an advantage for them for whatever they go into. It's good to see that they're succeeding and that means we must be doing the right thing.'

The big challenge for businesses like the Noy's is the growth in regulation over the years that is producing a lot of red tape and paperwork, including having to grapple with inconsistent interpretation of the rules. Paul says it's something that newcomers need to be aware of and get on top of quickly.

'You can't just come into the industry and build a house,' he says. 'I'm finding the structure is the easy part nowadays, it's all the red tape that is harder to manage.'

That's where HIA's training and advice can be crucial, says Paul. He should know. HIA has been along for the ride from the beginning, recently presenting the business with its 50-year membership recognition.

'If I've been unsure about something, you know that HIA is always there, that you can rely on them to put you on to somebody who can help you out,' Paul says. 'The webinars have been great. They must be helpful for other builders who are up and coming.'

So, what lies ahead for the company? More of the same, says Paul – growing and learning but staying with what it does best.

And keeping their inspirational industry success story going for the emerging generation of family members would be a legacy its founder Rene Noy would surely be proud of. [www.noybuilders.com.au](http://www.noybuilders.com.au) 



'[OUR APPRENTICES] GET A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE BECAUSE WE DO SO MANY DIFFERENT THINGS'



NOY BUILDERS HAS RIDDEN THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY AND THE CHANGING FACES OF THE BUILDING INDUSTRY SINCE 1971

