

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# Finding Beauty in Balance

## The Art of Restoring Classic Homes



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A conversation with J. Michael Bogan of JM Bogan Remodeling and Benjamin and Courtenay Gebhardt of Blue Sound Construction.



### PHOTOS THIS PAGE

This classic Tudor Revival home in Magnolia was given new life by Blue Sound Construction. Inset: JM Bogan built this Modern Victorian home with architects Board & Vellum for clients passionate about 19th century design.

### PHOTOS FACING PAGE

Top left: A light-flooded library/corridor in JM Bogan's Modern Victorian. Bottom left: Modern Victorian interior, by JM Bogan. Top right: A beautifully built entrance by Blue Sound Construction beckons you inside a Mid-Century Modern in Seattle's Blue Ridge neighborhood.



PHOTO: MIRANDA ESTES PHOTOGRAPHY



*When architects are careful to maintain the proportions, regulating lines, and character of the original, there's a sort of harmony that reverberates throughout both the home and its surroundings.*

**COURTENAY GEBHARDT**, Blue Sound Construction

The cities of the Puget Sound are relatively young, but they boast an impressive array of classic early-twentieth-century homes. From Victorian mansions to Modernist masterpieces, these houses speak to our region's history and aesthetic sensibilities.

But all things age, and the remaining pockets of these old-timers need special care to keep on impressing. Thankfully, lovers of these homes are well-served by remodelers, contractors, and architects who've made renovation and restoration part of their trade.

It's not easy preserving the original charm of an old house while adhering to modern code and meeting a client's goals. I reached out to two companies with reputations for quality, JM Bogan Remodeling and Blue Sound Construction, to get a sense of how they navigate this tricky, three-way balancing act.

### Learning From the Classics

Established in 1977, Fall City-based JM Bogan Remodeling takes a customer-centric approach to residential and commercial projects. As a design-build company that integrates planning and construction from the start, their work runs the gamut of

remodels, restorations, and custom work.

The company, now in its second generation, was founded by J. Michael Bogan over 46 years ago. Michael already had ample experience in residential remodeling when he began working in historic neighborhoods in Bellingham and Whatcom County, so restoration was a natural fit.

"I possessed a basic understanding of geometry [essential to the design of many older homes], a good work ethic, and a desire to learn," Michael says. "There were Victorians and Craftsman Bungalows, log homes and barns. I fell in

love with the craft and found opportunities to do some wonderful things."

When it comes to style, Michael admires a wide range of old homes, but ultimately it's about the client. "Whether the home is painted or stained, on Queen Anne Hill or the mountains, producing what the client wants is what matters most." And it's achieving their vision that Michael finds most satisfying.

For Blue Sound Construction, a Seattle-based construction company established in 2006, working with old homes was something they always knew they wanted to do. With a high level of technical knowledge and craft, they felt they





PHOTO: ALEX HAYDEN

could accomplish something “meaningful and profound.”

“We grew up admiring old homes’ charm, and trying to understand the source of that charm has been a lifelong personal passion,” says Co-Founder and Director Courtenay Gebhardt. This led the company to “research geometric proportions, preservation tactics, and the history of European craft organizations.”

When I ask Courtenay about her favorite styles, she mentions Tudors, Craftsman homes, Foursquares, and Mid-Century Moderns. But what she loves most isn’t any one type. It’s “working on respectful renovations that honor the home’s innate design language.”

“When architects are careful to maintain the proportions,

What sets a company like JM Bogan apart, says Michael, is the “experience that comes with being a multigenerational company.” That sense of passing the torch through the generations dovetails nicely with the work of classic home restoration.

“JM Bogan Co. is truly a family team. My own construction experience began in 1975 and my son Brandon grew up around construction in the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Together, we have the combined experience and knowledge our clients need—administration, trade skills, and execution.”

These assets are freely transferred to employees. “They learn trade skills and have opportunities to develop their craft. It has always been a part of our company culture to pass it on.” That means everyone brings a high level of expertise to each project.

Even when you have the talent and experience, there is no one way to work on restoration projects, and every home requires its own approach. As Michael puts it, “There is no one-size-fits-all handbook. Each project has its own specific requirements.”

Meeting them calls for a trained eye. “Sometimes the task is simple; sometimes it’s complex. At times discernment seems to come naturally, but it’s really a learned skill—like hitting a bullseye at 100 yards, it’s something you learn by doing.”

For Courtenay, going the extra mile means working with architects who understand classical design. “Because they’re trained in the aesthetic



PHOTO: VISTA ESTATE IMAGING

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### **That Special Something**

Restoring or renovating a classic home means bringing a high level of craftsmanship and skill to every facet of the project. But that’s just the starting point. Any company taking on this kind of work needs to bring something extra to the table if they want a result that hits the mark.



PHOTO: ALEX HAYDEN

principles underlying a lot of historic buildings, they have a built-in understanding of what's worth preserving and what new elements can achieve the same effect."

In return, Blue Sound Construction offers a high level of skill, craft, and cost controls that allow them to implement specific designs and revise as needed. But what sets them apart, says Courtenay's husband, Principal and Co-founder Benjamin, is their abiding appreciation for classic homes.

"We're deeply sensitive to the charm of historic homes and want to do right by them. But we're also realistic about pricing and happy to offer practical advice when the approach is collaborative. Clients who are clear about their values upfront will ultimately drive what we are able to do for them."

### Evergreen Features and Seismic Shifts

As times change, so do building standards. Many features we take for granted these days weren't

even an afterthought in 1920. As a Built Green member, Blue Sound Construction prioritizes new sustainable building practices, but they try to balance the latest practices with the original spirit of the place.

Sometimes preserving that spirit is also the greenest approach. Says Benjamin, "We challenge the common idea that disposing with old, single pane windows—which often have a lot of charm, inherent value, and irreplaceability—represents huge energy savings."

By sealing leaks, applying fresh weatherstripping, repairing the glazing, and swapping components, "the insulative difference between an old window and a new double-paned windows is minimal." Not only that, but windows tuned up with high-quality materials can "outlast a replacement window."

"We think preservation and beauty are probably the most neglected topics when it comes to environmental impact," says Benjamin. "A beautiful building is unlikely to be torn down over the

### PHOTOS FACING PAGE

Top: A handsomely restored washroom in a Foursquare in Queen Anne, by Blue Sound Construction.

Middle: Blue Sound Construction modernized this Capitol Hill Foursquare's interior and restored its deteriorating front deck to its former glory.

Bottom: Interior space in Blue Sound Construction's Queen Anne Foursquare project.

### PHOTOS THIS PAGE

Below: Historical transom windows and ceiling beams in Blue Sound Construction's Blue Ridge Mid-Century Modern.

Bottom left: A spacious, light-soaked living and entertaining space in the Magnolia Tudor (Blue Sound Construction).

Bottom right: Gorgeous bathroom in JM Bogan's Modern Victorian.



PHOTO: MIRANDA ESTES PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO: ALEX HAYDEN





long run, and that prevents the carbon-intensive manufacturing of new buildings.”

Other building standards are less negotiable.

Making sure old homes that didn’t succumb to prior quakes survive the next one is always in the back of Michael’s mind when taking on renovations. He recalls watching the 1989 World Series when the earthquake shook Candlestick Park. “It wasn’t long after that seismic considerations in building sciences and construction practices became part of code.”

“Altering or adding to an existing structural element today often requires structural analysis and engineered connections with steel, straps and rods, and epoxy adhesives at depth of embedment, with all sorts of manufactured seismic accoutrements,” explains Michael. All these keep the structure safely tethered to its foundation. “We have the technology today, and we use it.”

### Out of the Past

Both companies work in contemporary spaces as much as in older homes, but the classics do offer important lessons for modern construction and have

deepened their work across the board. For Michael and JM Bogan, it’s understanding the basic principles underlying all home construction and seeing how the puzzle fits together.

“Knowing how something is constructed can be the next best thing to X-ray vision. This knowledge often provides an understanding of how a house can best be safely deconstructed.” Armed with that information, a design-build company can achieve virtually anything a modern remodel might call for.

Working on the classics has led

Benjamin, Courtenay, and Blue Sound Construction to question some of the choices made in contemporary homes. Says Benjamin, “I think, for better or for worse, it has made us a bit skeptical of some modern building designs and practices. We’ve seen the things that don’t hold up versus those that do.”

Thankfully, as long as designers and builders keep exploring classic homes, the wisdom of older design will not be lost. Using modern materials and techniques, JM Bogan and Blue Sound Construction work to make sure these treasures endure. 📌

## Passion Projects



### Tudor Tune-Up

Benjamin’s favorite Blue Sound Construction project is a waterfront Tudor in Laurelhurst, “maybe because it was our first big historic job. We rebuilt a second staircase and replaced the main staircase’s extensive octagonal turret wall’s French casement windows within their brick openings.”

One of several Tudors Benjamin and team were contracted to rejuvenate, the project also involved vaulting the ceiling, installing a new leaded glass window, and adding a claw-footed tub that complemented the original aesthetic. The result was a beautiful and consistent interior space.

“Our work gave the home the little kiss it needed. But there are many, many charming homes with which we enjoy an affectionate bond. They live in our minds because we feel we played a part in their legacy.”

### Georgian Revival

Michael’s favorite JM Bogan project was the full restoration of the Wurdemann Mansion in 1995. This handsome 1915 Georgian—listed on the National Registry of Historic Places—is the last surviving home in the “first eight” community in Lake Forest Park in Seattle and a cherished community asset.

The two-acre home features extensive gardens and fountains, French doors, four bedrooms, a library, and a carriage house. JM Bogan was hired to restore much of the home, indoors and out, including additions in the form of the new master bathroom and sewing room and the transformation of the carriage house, pictured here, into into an ADU and three-car garage.

JM Bogan strove to preserve the existing structure and ensure new millwork matched the old. For their impressive efforts, they received MBAKS’ 1995 REX Award for Room Addition. Says Michael, “It was a wonderful opportunity and a feather in my cap. More than a quarter century later, it still stands.”

