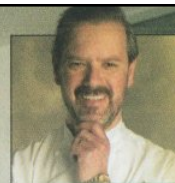


Small Business

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RISING DOUGH • 23

Gerhard Michler plans to expand retail presence of his Austrian pastries.



SNAPSHOT:

Castle Constructors

What it does: Home remodels.

Founder: Ken Page.

Location: San Francisco.

Founded: 2002.

2008 revenue: \$4.6 million.

2007 revenue: \$2.6 million.

2006 revenue: \$799,000.

Three-year growth: 475.7 percent.

Employees: 13.

Web site: castleconstructors.com

"It's kind of an accidental construction company," says Page of his second career as a contractor.

Castle builds painless remodels

S.F.'s contractor scores work despite recession

BY LAZARO FRAGA
San Francisco Business Times

For Ken Page, founding home renovation company Castle Constructors meant remodeling his career. The former PriceWaterhouseCoopers consultant jumped from the corporate life to building a small business. That professional reinvention has paid off.

"If you enjoy what you're doing, the money comes naturally," said Page, founder and CEO of San Francisco-based Castle, which has grown by 476 percent in the last three years, to \$4.6 million last year from \$799,000 in 2006. Page's background — he was an architecture student before settling on a degree in engineering and then joining PriceWaterhouseCoopers — has been a real strength for the business.

Page said that despite the bursting of the real estate bubble, referrals have carried Castle.

"From my point of view, families still needed to remodel," he said.

Castle currently has 13 employees, after cutting some this year due to the recession. However, he expects to keep hiring as business picks back up in the next year. He said he recently started a \$1.1 million project in Pacific Heights to turn a

two-bedroom home into a four-bedroom, four-bathroom, 3,000-square-foot home.

"We actually have a number of large projects coming," Page said. "We're probably going to hire another 10 people in the next eight months."

Page said that after his experience remodeling his home, he treats every project as if it were his own property.

"Since we do it for ourselves, we can appreciate doing it for other people," said Page. "We value their dollar."

Page said all of Castle's work is from referrals. That included remodeling Clifford Samuel's Noe Valley Victorian home. Last year, Castle tore down Samuel's 1,100-square-foot San Francisco house and built a 2,740-square-foot house in its place.

"They are meticulously driven to attention to details," said Samuel of Castle's work. "Ken's engineering background helps. You can tell from the workmanship."

Samuel said his recommendations have led to several projects for Castle, and a magazine scout stopped by to snap photos of the work for a possible future spread.

"The proof is in the results, and we are really pleased," Samuel said.

Because 80 percent of Castle's projects are in San Francisco, there's an extra layer of complication. Page said one of his greatest challenges has been trying to figure out how San Francisco's building department works.

"Coming from the corporate world, things made sense or at least people were all trying to

work in a common direction," said Page. "When you're working with the city, things don't always make sense."

Page said one of his biggest risks he's faced since starting the business has been hiring some employees from a local halfway house, but he is usually only disappointed by them when they eventually move on.

"I did relatively well in my last job and I wanted to try and give something back to the community," Page said. "The biggest disappointment is we do become attached to these employees, and these employees do tremendous things in a matter of years. They just grow so much."

Page said he started the business by happenstance.

"It just fell into place that way," said Page. After working at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, he went on to join a smaller consulting company where he eventually sold \$3 million in consulting work in his first two years and went from consultant to senior vice president.

"I decided to take a break from all the travel," Page said. "So I bought a house and decided to remodel it myself."

Despite his previous success, the fun he had remodeling his home and interest from friends who saw the quality of work he was getting done led him to completely give up on consulting and found Castle. "It's kind of the accidental construction company," he said.

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