

# FENESTRATION REVIEW ON

CANADA'S WINDOW AND DOOR MAGAZINE

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Fall 2018

## RIGHT ON THE WAVE

Thermoproof rides a  
swell of success



2018 BUYERS GUIDE - WET WINDOWS - WINDOOR PREVIEW

# RIGHT ON THE WAVE

Thermoproof uses a modern approach to beat challenges.

**C**am Drew is a busy guy. As the managing partner of Chemainus, B.C.,-based Thermoproof Windows and Doors, Cam has the same responsibilities that any person in charge of growing a busy manufacturing and installation company with more than 50 employees would have.

by RICH PORAYKO

A key difference is that Drew walks the walk when he speaks about supporting the community. He's been recognized twice with the distinguished Paul Harris Fellow award from two different Rotary Clubs. He also has the Scroll of Honour from the City of Duncan and is an honorary Kinsman and past president of the SPCA. And when we say community involvement, we mean involvement with his business community as well. Drew sits on the steering committee for the Home Performance Stakeholders Council of B.C. that is tasked with driving higher energy efficiency in the renovation market, and is part of the advisory group for the Pan-Canadian task force, which is working with the federal government to set out aspirational goals for energy efficiency until 2030. "The government is going to put a

lot of pressure on Canadian window manufacturers to meet these goals," explains Drew.

*Fenestration Review* caught up with Drew at the 2018 GlassBuild in Las Vegas to find out what sets Thermoproof apart from the competition.

"We have five values that we work with," says Drew. "Safety, quality, communication, teamwork and innovation. When we do our regular reviews with our team, those are the five areas that we focus on."

Drew and his team know the geographic location their windows are going to live in. "On the west coast, especially Vancouver Island, you need to build a rainscreen. We know they are going to get a lot of rain. You have to design the window appropriately. It's all about moving water away."

They are also going to get a lot of salt water

Drew (right) and production manager Shaun Goode take Lean-inspired "gemba" walks through the shop where they visit each work station to check on employees' morale, collect suggestions and troubleshoot problems. The proactive approach has measurable benefits for productivity.



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# COVER STORY

spray because most homes are within a few kilometers of the ocean. According to Drew, all the parts that Thermoproof builds into a window are either stainless steel or non-corrosive. “We can literally dip the window in salt water and it would be fine. If we’re going to back it with a lifetime warranty, we better put good components in it.”

Thermoproof was founded in the Chemainus Valley on the east coast of southern Vancouver Island in the late 1970s, manufacturing wood and aluminum windows. Drew, his wife, Maeve, and Drew’s shareholders acquired the company in 2007, about one year before the Great Recession. “We enjoyed around 14 good months before six challenging years,” recalls Drew with a laugh.

With the changes to the B.C. Energy Efficiency Act, Thermoproof discontinued aluminum products in 2009 shortly after the acquisition and went strictly vinyl. “We were making our own sealed units but discontinued around 2011 to make room for more growth. In 2012, we added new construction and installations to our area and stayed as a supplier for the rest of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.”

Drew shares that installation has been a helpful way to grow the company without putting as much pressure on capacity. “Our plant isn’t very large. We have 18,000 square feet under roof. We’re running pretty tight. I just talked to the guys. They’re pouring more cement and adding more outdoor storage right now. We’re maxing out our property because we want to stay. And we’ve got the extra locations.”

Thermoproof built a new showroom and added a warehouse in Duncan and then, in 2016, Drew acquired a building 140 kilometers north in Courtenay, B.C., allowing the company to open another showroom and provide supply and installation to the largest city in the Comox Valley.

Before being acquired by Drew and his partners, Thermoproof offered a 10-year pro-rated warranty. “We found that if a window was out of warranty, we were still fixing it. Customers are often surprised if we go back for a window that’s 18 or 19 years old and we completely refurbish it and fix it up for them. We decided that if we’re going to go any-



Production flexibility is key when building windows for the varying conditions in different parts of Vancouver Island. Happy workers help.

ways, we might as well give the lifetime warranty. And include labour and the screens. It’s been a great selling feature. Customers want peace of mind.”

Servicing the Gulf Islands with water access only can be tricky. “We coordinate scheduling directly with the barge, however there is that window of opportunity. It’s tide-specific. It can’t just be any time of the day and you want to make sure your order is full because you’re going to an island somewhere.”

Like many manufacturers, Thermoproof is on a Lean journey. “Our commitment to a daily ‘gemba’ walk has been very successful,” says Drew. Gemba, which loosely translated means “where the work is happening,” is a part of the Lean manufacturing philosophy. “Every morning at 9:00 a.m., our management team, up to five individuals, will start at the last work station and then we swim upstream. It even includes administration and can take up to an hour. The questions that are most important are, “How was your day yesterday?”; “How is everything today?”; and “Do you need anything?”

“We check their metrics and quality control. We’ve found is that it really cuts down on recuts and reworks. Quality has drastically improved. Communication has increased. People are being heard. If somebody has a good idea or if something’s gone wrong, we’re never more than 24 hours away from hearing. That’s been a very valuable tool in running our

company on the production side.”

“We had only been running the company for a year and a half when the Energy Efficiency Act came into place,” Drew remembers. “Some of our dealers thought it was us forcing them to put low-E in. We had to educate them that for one, it’s mandated. But two, it’s a really good idea.”

Drew and his team also trained Thermoproof’s dealers about elevation-specific glass. With thermal performance regulations set to change again, no one knows where the moving target will land. “Every company is in the same boat, we don’t know where we need to be and when,” says Drew. “Canadian manufacturers know now how to build a window so it’ll be structurally sound. We need to work on new designs to increase our thermal performance. We just don’t know how much we need to do and when because if we go all the way to the highest thermal performance possible, the customer will not be able afford it.”

“Right now in Canada, timing is everything. You can’t be ahead of the curve. You can’t be behind the curve. You’ve got to be right on that wave.”

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# The cat's in the cradle



*Some thoughts on work/life balance.*

by Rich Porayko

**W**hen I eventually pass, there are three things I will not be remembered for: one, being the designated driver, two, being a neat freak and, three, being able to accurately predict currency exchange rates. Although my career is extremely important to me and I want to try to provide my son with the same opportunities that my parents provided to me, I don't want "A Good Worker" engraved on my headstone, either. Like most fathers around the world, I want my kid to have a great childhood and remember me as a loving dad.

On top of that, as a Gen-Xer, I am a member of the Sandwich Generation. I worry about my parents and I worry about my kid. It's a lot to juggle but I believe that I have the answer. There's no trick to it; it's simple.

Time. Time with your family and friends. Especially your family. "Get to know your parents. You never know when they will be gone for good," wrote Baz Luhrmann.

There is no such thing as quality time. It's all quality. I'm hoping when my son Levi is a young man that the time my wife and I are spending with him now will pay off and help guide him.

I strongly believe that life is all about balance. Too much of anything isn't good. I talk the talk, however I'm still figuring it out.

Living in Metro Vancouver, I intimately understand that the cost of living in most Canadian cities is outrageous. I'm self-employed. No worky, no payee. Luckily, many employers are starting to get it and offer flex time and family responsibility days. Others understand how productive remote workers can be and are allowing employees to work at home.

Working remotely isn't all baseball hats and watering your garden in a housecoat. Sure there is a little bit of that but it's not for everyone. You need discipline to maintain the balance. Having a home office is both a blessing and a curse. Obviously the biggest challenge for most is that it's easy to get distracted. Personally, I'm

highly motivated by the fear of poverty so distractions aren't a problem for me. If my stakeholders aren't happy with my results, then the party's over. It's that simple.

Like many, I have the opposite problem: it's too easy to sit down and work. There is always a list of projects to do. Or taxes. Or bookkeeping. I grind away evenings, weekends and statutory holidays, missing out on bike rides, trips to the water park, the pool and countless more. But for each late night (it's almost midnight now), I get a morning where I can walk my son to and from school. Since Levi was born, I've gotten him ready in the morning and taken him to daycare, preschool, kindergarten and grade one. He's in grade two now and in the big picture of life, you cannot put a price on that.

Career, family or self – pick two. At this point in my life, I have chosen to simmer self on the back burner (mostly) and focus as much energy on my career and family as possible. That's fine for the short term but it's not sustainable.

Getting creative with my "flexible" work hours has helped, however the longer I do this, the better I get at spotting time-wasters. As a pleaser, I can spot a time-waster but I still try to help. More often than not, I get screwed. To help prioritize, I am making an effort to do a simple acid test: is this in the best interest of my career, family and friends or myself? Because if it is taking away time that I can be spending on any of the Big Three, it should be a no-brainer to let it go.

Life is short. Take the trip. Buy the toy. Eat the cake. Fire the time-wasters.

"When you coming home, son?/I don't know when/ But we'll get together then, Dad./We're gonna have a good time then."

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