



# CAPE COD LIFE

## PUBLICATIONS

Since 1979

Cape Cod Home / Annual Home 2019  
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## The Next Wave: HOME Annual 2019

“Having both a business sense and hands-on experience is important, and if you can merge the two together, no matter what business you’re in, that’s the key to success. But you have to be willing to sacrifice and put the time in that it takes to get to where you want to go.”

As a child, Paul van Steensel fondly remembers his late mother reading to him “The Little Engine That Could.” It’s a story he now shares with his two young sons—the message of “I think I can, I think I can” still resonating with him to this day.

At the age of 26, van Steensel founded Cape Dreams Building and Design in 2006, since becoming one of the preeminent construction firms on Cape Cod. But success did not come overnight to van Steensel. While a junior at the University of Southern California’s prestigious Marshall School of Business, he and a friend started their own company in partnership with Tower Records, selling discgear (i.e. little CD storage cases). He took a semester off from school to run the burgeoning business, but economic turmoil caused the company to fall to the wayside. Faced with overwhelming debt, van Steensel was unable to go back to college and get his business degree.

“I felt like I failed,” he recalls, “but that just turned into this determination that I was going to succeed.” In 2001 van Steensel came to the Cape, where as a teenager he spent summers working construction jobs and fixing up the cottage behind Cobie’s Restaurant in Brewster. He decided to pursue work as a carpenter, spending the next five years learning as much as he could about the industry. “I knew someday I was going to own my own business,” he says. “I had a lot of people saying, ‘You should wait until you have more time under your belt.’ But the opportunity was there, and I took it.”

Though van Steensel and Cape Dreams faced hardship early on due to the economic crisis of 2008, he and his tight-knit team kept pushing forward, staying afloat by doing whatever work they could get their hands on. “I give the credit to the talented carpenters and woodworkers that we employ,” van Steensel says. “It’s the attention to detail, it’s the fact that we don’t subcontract high-end finish work. We’re able to deliver the same quality product to each client.” With business now booming, it’s clear van Steensel’s gumption has paid off. “Over the last two years the reality set in, like, yeah, we’re here, we made it,” he says, “so now it’s about keeping it going. It’s fun.”