

# profits & passions

## Joseph Minuta

*Creating time to think*



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There's nothing like watching the sun come up over the hills of the Dutchess County when you need time to refresh your mind. Just ask architect Joseph Minuta, whose Italian forebears were masons who seem to have nudged him toward architecture naturally. "After all, we built the Coliseum," said Minuta of Italians and architecture, "so it's in our blood." He heads to the river regularly to think about architecture (and fishing), and just to get away.

"I'm the first generation of my dad's family born in this country," said Minuta. It was Minuta's grandfather, a master mason in his native country, who taught the architect much of what he knows. "My grandfather and my uncle were amazing," said Minuta. "They passed that talent on to their children and grandchildren. We've not only built homes together but are never finished working on our own."

What better complement to the skills learned at his grandfather's knee than via the computer-assisted drafting machines IBM donated to the Newburgh Free Academy back in the early 1980s. "They created an opportunity for those in-

terested in the building arts," said Minuta. "We were really fortunate that program was at the school and that IBM invested in that kind of learning at the time."

Minuta has worked in earnest in the industry since 1989, eventually receiving his degree and hanging out his architectural shingle in 2001. And while everyone has taken a hit in the current economy, he said the company is holding its own. "Yes, we are lucky. We work hard, and we do have some government contracts that keep us going. It's a very tough time out there for many, not just in my industry, but in all industries."

While 2001 witnessed a boom in residential construction in the Hudson Valley, the subprime crisis has imploded on many builders. Minuta said his business is "diversified . . . we did some residential, some commercial, some retail. These days, it's been more retail and work in the elder-care field. It has been a rollercoaster for most of America. We all want to know, 'When will things get better?'"

Perhaps that's why the idea of getting away from it all – but not straying too far from home – got Minuta thinking about buying a boat. "It gives me an opportunity to spend some extra time with my father, Vincent. We both love fishing

### Occupation:

Architect

### Lives in:

New Windsor

### Works in:

Hudson Valley

### Passion:

Boating

and there's nothing like going up the river fishing for stripers. It really is relaxing."

Minuta owns a 20-foot Thompson pleasure boat. To date, the farthest he's gone north is Kingston. To the south, he stops at the Tappan Zee Bridge.

"You aren't going to find a more beautiful stretch of the Hudson than that," said Minuta. "When I shut off the engine, I enjoy the quiet and the beauty of the scenery. It's an unbelievably calming experience, a real

sense of solace for me. I do some of my best thinking, too."

Back to the business: "We got ranked fourth in HVBiz's Book of Lists for firm size in Hudson Valley, and we are very proud of that. We've grown in such a short time. As I said, we've been lucky enough to stay busy and keep our staff, and we are seeing an uptick in proposals we're put out."

When it comes to residential building, is the McMansion a going the way of the dinosaur? "Quite frankly, my firm is contemplating a more holistic approach, incorporating green technology to keep homes smaller and 'off the grid,'" said Minuta. "Most of the McMansions were built on spec at a time when mortgages were easy to obtain – unfortunately, when the owners moved in, they found the cost unsustainable. They were paying so much in taxes and utilities, they had no quality of life. Many of them now have their extended families living with them. These huge homes don't really make sense for most of us. From a financial and energy standpoint they are gluttonous."

Minuta is an advocate of two-family owner-occupied homes. "It increases the area's per capita income, provides housing stock and helps keep neighborhoods stable. It amazes me how many municipalities are fighting them. Don't they realize that in an owner-occupied home, the owner isn't going to let someone move in they wouldn't want to live with themselves?"

He's hoping the current economic crisis is going to change the mindsets of many, not just in the way things are built regarding energy efficiency, but regarding people friendliness that reflects itself in sustainable neighborhoods that are real places to live, work and play. "People want neighborhoods they can walk in. It isn't just the people who are moving here from other parts of the state. Even the people who have been here all their lives know it is a better quality of life to know your neighbor and to have a real sense of community."

Minuta ponders these pointers as he's sailing, "a great way to think about how you'd like to be a part in bringing good change to the Hudson Valley. Whether people like it or not, it is growing and will continue to grow."

**Successful business people have many dimensions, they even manage to have some fun.**