

# HOMELIVING

Spring 2011

COVER STORY

## A lasting style

Page 96

## Spring has sprung ...

Page 90

## Spring fling

Page 92

## Pampering spaces

Page 101



# A lasting style

**F**otis Dulos left his high-power, lucrative consulting job in New York in pursuit of a good cup of coffee. “I realized that I really wanted to live in Connecticut. I was tired of New York City. I wanted to wake up and brew my own coffee in the morning and do my own thing.”

And with that he began the transition from being a management consultant for *Fortune* 100 companies such as MetLife and John Hancock, through his job at Ernst & Young, to becoming a fine homebuilder and entrepreneur starting his own company – Fore Group, Inc., based in Farmington.

A native of Athens, Greece, Dulos grew up in a family of entrepreneurs. His father and grandfather before him had both been tanners in a successful family-founded company in Turkey. His father, Dulos said, wanted the same for his son. “Growing up, my father could not have imagined me going and working for somebody. He always said, ‘You have to have your own company.’”

But in reality, Dulos (then in his 20s) first needed to get his proverbial feet wet and did so with his consulting role until he felt the time was right to leave. And when he decided to walk away from what many would consider a dream job to become a home builder, he had to first convince his accountant that he was making the right decision. “You go through cycles in life and this had run its course. The hardest thing was to convince my accountant that this made sense.”

But he said it only took a couple of hours before his accountant was

onboard. Now, they laugh about it. “He never imagined we could do so well.”

Doing well seems to be an understatement. The company is, in fact, flourishing. In the past few years, he and his partners have built more than 25 breathtaking homes in and around New England – along with completing renovations for others – most in the Farmington Valley. Along with making a name for themselves, they’ve garnered nine statewide Home Building Industry (HOBI) awards from the Home Builders Association of Connecticut in the past two years, no small achievement for a business that arrived on the scene just a few years ago.

While he is the founder of the company, Dulos is just one of four cornerstone individuals who comprise Fore Group, Inc. The other members of his team are Steffen Reich, Peter Nisenson, and Guillaume Vidallet. Though each of them takes on a different role, they are all equally adept at stepping into the other’s shoes when

A young, ambitious firm is making its mark in the Farmington Valley and beyond.

BY SARAH WESLEY LEMIRE | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF FORE GROUP, INC.



Above: 35 Pheasant Hill Road, Canton

Left: 34 Sky View Drive, Avon

Right: 47 Bart Drive, Canton



## Winning work

Farmington-based Fore Group won four prestigious HOBI awards in the 2010 statewide annual design competition held by the Home Builders Association of Connecticut (HBA-CT).

**BEST CUSTOM HOME 9,000 – 10,000 SF**  
Fore Group for 34 Sky View Drive, Avon

**BEST VACATION HOME OUT OF STATE**  
Fore Group for 45A Mallard Lake Road, Pound Ridge, N.Y.

**BEST SPEC HOME \$750,000 – \$1 MILLION**  
Fore Group for 5 Charlotte Court in Avon

**BEST SPEC HOME UNDER \$500,000**  
Fore Group for 17 Skiperene Lane, Burlington

necessary, which explains why none of their business cards has a title on them. “Everyone has a core competence, but can cover for each other in many ways,” Dulos said. “We don’t have any clear hierarchy, no vertical or horizontal lines. We’re fluid as a group, and it works very well for us.”

But they do each bring a unique component to the table with their shared experience and abilities. Reich, who worked on Wall Street as an equity analyst before mov-

ing to Connecticut and attaining his real estate license, is essentially the liaison between the company and the buyer. As part of that role, he works to create the “maximum synergy” between the seller and the builder. He also serves as the company’s sales and marketing agent and is considered to be the “problem solver” of the group. He adds with a chuckle that he’s “the computer guy,” too.

At just 27, Nisenson is the youngest of the four and serves as the construction official for the company. From an early age, Nisenson was in awe of construction sites and was drawn to building. “It’s kind of a lifelong process. When I was a young child, I had a very strong draw to carpentry and handyman work,” he said.

He parlayed that intrigue into a career, and after attending the Pratt Institute in New York for construction management, he went to work for an architect in Manhattan. It was an experience, he said, that allowed him to develop as a builder. He’s a visionary who revels in

turning a static image into a three-dimensional structure. “It’s great to look at an architect’s vision – something that’s on a piece of paper – and turn it into reality. That’s what I like about it. You are actually creating something that is in someone’s head and on a two-dimensional page, and then you bring it to life.”

Assuming the role of project manager and accountant is Vidallet. Originally from France, he came to the U.S. after being awarded a tennis scholarship from the University of North Alabama. Upon receiving his bachelor’s degree, he headed for New York, where he attended NYU and received his master’s in science for construction management. Vidallet says his role requires him to oversee everything and keep vigilant watch. “To understand how a company works, you need to have your eyes on everything,” he said.

Ultimately, it’s Dulos who is essentially the “conductor” of the group, serving as the maestro who brings it all together. But he makes it clear while they all have clearly defined roles, they aren’t

beholden to any one of them.

"It's important that we're all doing spreadsheets, we're all doing the project plans, we're all doing the updates for the clients, we're all doing the budgeting, we're all getting the quotations for our projects that we're each responsible for," Dulos said.

Beyond that, it's a necessity for all of them to be "hands on" and involved, considering the complexity of the projects they are working on. Currently, they are working with world-renowned architect Peter Bohlin (known for his Apple stores in New York City, among other projects) to build a home on Block Island.

The owner of the home heard of Fore Group by word of mouth and contracted the firm to build the house. Planning for the project began in 2007; the construction process began in 2009. Building the intricate glass and steel home on an island has required a significant amount of preparation and effort.

Nisenson says that it's been a real challenge for the team. "The site is on Block Island, and it's on the ocean. So you have to first figure out how you're going to get your workers, [construction vehicles] and material to the island, which is a major task in and of itself. There's been a lot of coordination and logistics." And then he adds with a laugh, "And befriending the ferry lady."

In addition to the Block Island home, they've also built a series of distinctive homes in Farmington ranging from \$1.35 million to \$3 million – homes whose grandeur and attention to detail can make even the most discriminating buyer catch his or her breath.

Dulos is quick to point out that his company's purpose is not to build "McMansions," but rather to build homes that will remain graceful and appealing through the years. He points to one of their homes and says, "This house could have been around

200 years ago. In 300 years, it will still look the same. People will always like this type of house."

Reich adds, "It's timeless."

And ensuring the endurance of their homes is what matters to all four members of Fore Group. "Someone can put up a house," Nisenson says, "but it might not be built properly. We're not going to cut corners to save money. It's important to us to do it correctly — the best way possible."

That diligence is accompanied by a very serious work ethic, and all four are clearly committed to doing whatever necessary to maintain their level of efficiency and standards. According to Dulos, every one of them is driven and completely dedicated.

"I don't like to work with people I need to micromanage," he says. "I came from a work ethic where you go to work before the client arrives and leave after the client does. It was inconceivable to not get the job done." They often hold meetings until two or three in the morning, and this past winter, they met several times at 4 a.m. because that's when they were all available.

In the end, what they seek is permanence and recognition for the care and quality they put into each home they build or renovate. "I think there's a lot of pride for us," Reich says, "We all share a common vision and like what we do and the people we work with. We want to build and we want to excel."

Dulos agrees, explaining that it's not about the money, but about building something lasting – something they can all be proud of.

In the years to come, they hope to continue building on what they've started and, according to Nisenson, eventually become the premier resource in the Northeast for custom homes. "If you have a special home to build, you come to us because we're the best; that's where I'd like to see us," he says.

And from there, the sky's the limit, according to Dulos. "If we can

build on Block Island, why can't we build on St. Bart's? Why can't we build something in France or in Mykonos, Greece or Aspen — where we take something complex and exciting, and make it come true?"

In the meantime, they are content with where they are and plan to continue their pursuit of creating something tangible and satisfying with Fore Group, Inc.

"If you ask me what my vision would be," Dulos says, "It would be that, many years from now, we'll look back and be happy with what we've done and with each other."

"So far, we have been," says Riech, "and we are looking forward to more." 🏠

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