

RAVEN METAL PRODUCTS BRING ARTISAN APPROACH TO METAL WORK

Cobble Hill Company Creates Industry-Changing Products

COBBLE HILL - It's been 20 years since **Raven Metal Products Ltd.** opened its doors, and the company has left a major impact on the construction world.

Thanks to its inventive owner, **Randy Sewell**, the company has come up with solutions that have permanently changed the industry.

Raven's team includes some of the leading architectural sheet metal designers and installers on Vancouver Island. With its dedicated crew of sheet metal artisans, and expert installers, the company offers competitive pricing and an industry-leading 25 year warranty on its work.

The company supplies contractors and retailers, and performs custom installation and custom copper work.

"I started my sheet metal apprenticeship in 1980, working with a roofing company in Toronto," says Sewell. "I learned to do architectural metalwork there, working under an experienced journeyman who taught me to do cornice (the intricate metal



Randy Sewell, owner of Raven Metal Products, learned architectural metalwork during his sheet metal apprenticeship in the 1980s

molding work that decorates the top of old buildings)."

Upon completing his schooling at **George Brown College**, Sewell started his own operation, working with heating and ventilation systems, eventually installing and maintaining ground source heat pumps.

"I moved to BC in 1994 and worked for a roofing company for a couple of years before going back into architectural sheet metal," he continues. "After the company closed its doors in 1998, I started Raven Metal Products with a partner and two other employees."

After immediately experiencing rapid growth, Sewell bought out his partner, becoming the sole owner of the company.

"I started the business right around the start of the leaky condo crisis, so I ended up working closely with wall system and stucco contractors and engineers, to redesign all the exterior metal products," he reflects.

During this time, Sewell met with several business owners and an engineering firm to create products that would address the leaky condos. Together, they

developed new vents and saddles, including the innovative *Mach 4 Vent*, which includes an extra plate soldered to the pipe, allowing the vent to be properly sealed to the wall.

"**Graham Besant**, who worked for **RDH Engineering** at the time, called me up one day and said, 'we'll need some of those vents,'" Sewell remarks. "At the time, we didn't have a name for them, but the Mach series razors were all the rage. Graham called the vent a Mach 4 as a joke, and the name just stuck."

This isn't the only innovative product created by Sewell and his team.

"I was working on a leaky condo job on the inner harbour, and we had done a two-storey mock-up of what the whole building would probably look like," he says. "When I arrived on the site after it was all done, I looked up and saw an issue with some window screening material right above the flashing."

"When the superintendent asked what I could do, I remembered a product I had at my house - some material with a bunch of holes in it. He thought it was



Raven offers competitive pricing and an industry-leading 25 year warranty on its work



The company operates out of a 12,000 square foot space, one of the biggest on the Island

brilliant, showed the engineer, and three days later, he had plans on my desk specifying that this product be used on the job."

Two years after this job, the material, called *Perforated J Vent Strip*, was worked into the building code. Raven Metal Products now sells around two million feet of the product every year.

These and other materials can be found at **Slegg Lumber**, **Central Builders**, **Home Hardware**, **Ken's Roofing** and other retailers across the Island. A large number of Island homes built over the last twenty years will feature a piece of metal on the roof or elsewhere in the home that was manufactured by Raven Metal Products.

Raven currently provides a complete array of flashing, wall and exhaust vents, perforated

aluminum, soffit, panels and many more products that are used on a large percentage of west coast homes.

"I think we stand out in the industry for several key reasons," says Sewell. "First, we carry a large stock of metal so we can have quick turnarounds."

"We probably have an average of \$150,000 worth of raw material sitting on our shelf at any given time, and we carry just about every size and colour of sheet metal in stock."

Second, Sewell brings decades of experience to the table, and acts as a consultant on many unique and challenging projects.

"When people don't know what to do when it comes to sheet metal, I'm the guy they call," he says. "I go out to the site and tell



The team at Raven Metal Products

them what they need to do, and since I've been involved with engineers for many years, I can pretty much tell you what needs to be done on any wall or roof application."

Third, Raven specializes in architectural metal work, and is one of only a handful of metal fabricators that is recommended by the **Vancouver Historical Society** and building inspectors to work on historical buildings.

"When I arrived in Victoria back in 1994, I remember looking at the Janion building on Pandora thinking, 'what a shame - all this beautiful metal work is going to waste,' says Sewell. "I really hoped I'd get to work on it someday."

20 years later, the building was undergoing extensive renovations, and Sewell was called in as a consultant.

"A week after I gave my recommendations, they sent me a list and asked us to do the metal work," he continues. "We did such a good job with it that the architects, **Merrick Architecture**, told one of its Vancouver cohorts

about us.

"They called us up and asked us to work on a project in Vancouver, dangling a big, beautiful bit of architecture in front of me. I eventually gave in, and we've done about a half dozen buildings over there so far."

Thanks to Sewell's unique trade experiences in Toronto, Raven Metal Products is able to provide beautiful cornice and decorative metal work to its clients, a skill set that is increasingly rare in the industry.

Recently, Raven completed a series of tasks on the Tamura Building project, located at Powell and Dunlevy in Vancouver. This included: completing the metal restoration, manufacturing copies of components from long-gone pieces from photographs, and providing top-of-the-line installation on the complex decorative metal.

"Because we specialize in architectural sheet metal, we have all the architectural equipment," says Sewell. "Other companies may dabble in this type of work, but not many specialize

like we do.

"The old guys who used to do that work have all retired, and most didn't teach the younger generation how to do what they did. Very few of us now know how to do this architectural end of the work."

Sewell is now endeavouring to keep the tradition alive, running a government-approved apprenticeship program.

"Our apprentices have really good training from manufacturing all the way up to installation," he says. "We operate in a 12,000 square foot space, which is one of the biggest sheet metal shops on the Island."

Raven has now grown from four employees in 1998 to about 25, including architectural sheet metal workers, installers, journeymen, and apprentices, along with 3 of-ice staff.

"Some of my old apprentices have gone on to bigger and better things," he continues. "One of my apprentices is now running the sheet metal show for one of my customers, and one is now working for the school board doing

all their sheet metal repairs."

Many of Randy's employees have been with him for the long-haul, with Melissa, who Sewell calls his "right hand girl," being with the company for 19 years, and many others working with the team for over a decade.

Thanks to the size of its shop and staff, Raven Metal Products is able to diversify its offerings. "We manufacture vents that go into the wholesale divisions, selling to companies like Slegg, Ken's Roofing, or Home Hardware," he says.

"We also do custom manufacturing for clients such as **Farmer, Kinetic Construction, Custom Pro Exteriors, H&R Exteriors, Frenette Exteriors, Brytar**, and others. Additionally, we help all of those customers when a product requires a challenging installation. This type of work involves going on-site and measuring and installing.

"Finally, we do contract work, from consulting to figuring out what needs to be done to restore historic metal work, all the way to manufacturing and installing



Working on the face of the Tamura Building

the finished product."

Thanks to its unique specializations, innovation, adding new products, and commitment to quality work, Raven Metal Products has built an excellent reputation in the community, relying on word-of-mouth, an outside sales representative, and social media awareness to grow the business.

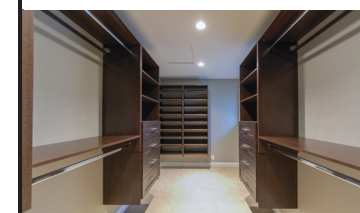
"If you treat your customers right, they keep coming back," Sewell concludes. "We're not perfect, but we always make sure we finish the job right, no matter what happens."

Visit the Raven Metal Website for an in depth look at what they do.

www.ravenmetal.ca

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