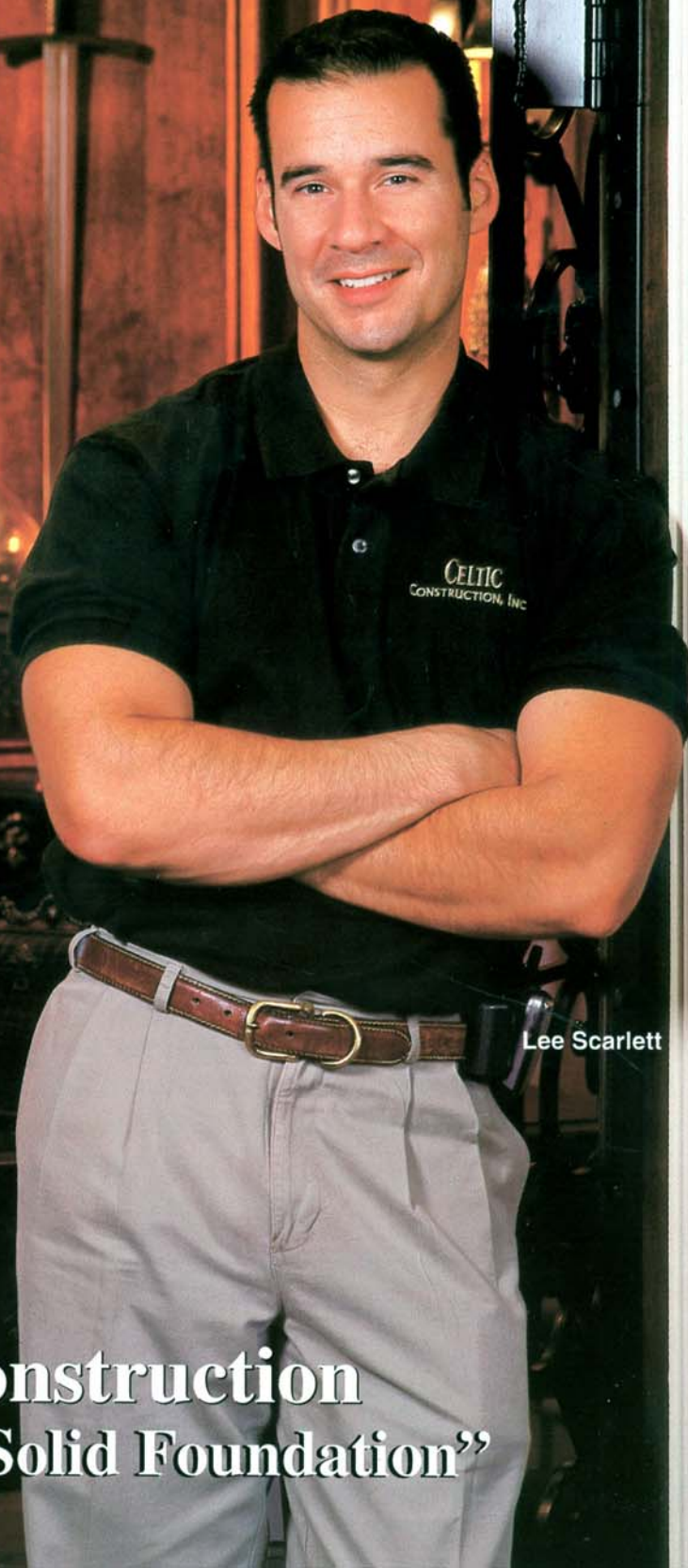


# Builder/Architect

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Year



Lee Scarlett

**Celtic Construction**  
**“A Strong and Solid Foundation”**

# Celtic Construction

## A Strong and Solid Foundation

*By Brenda Marshall,  
Photography by John Ammatucci & Nathan Harmon*

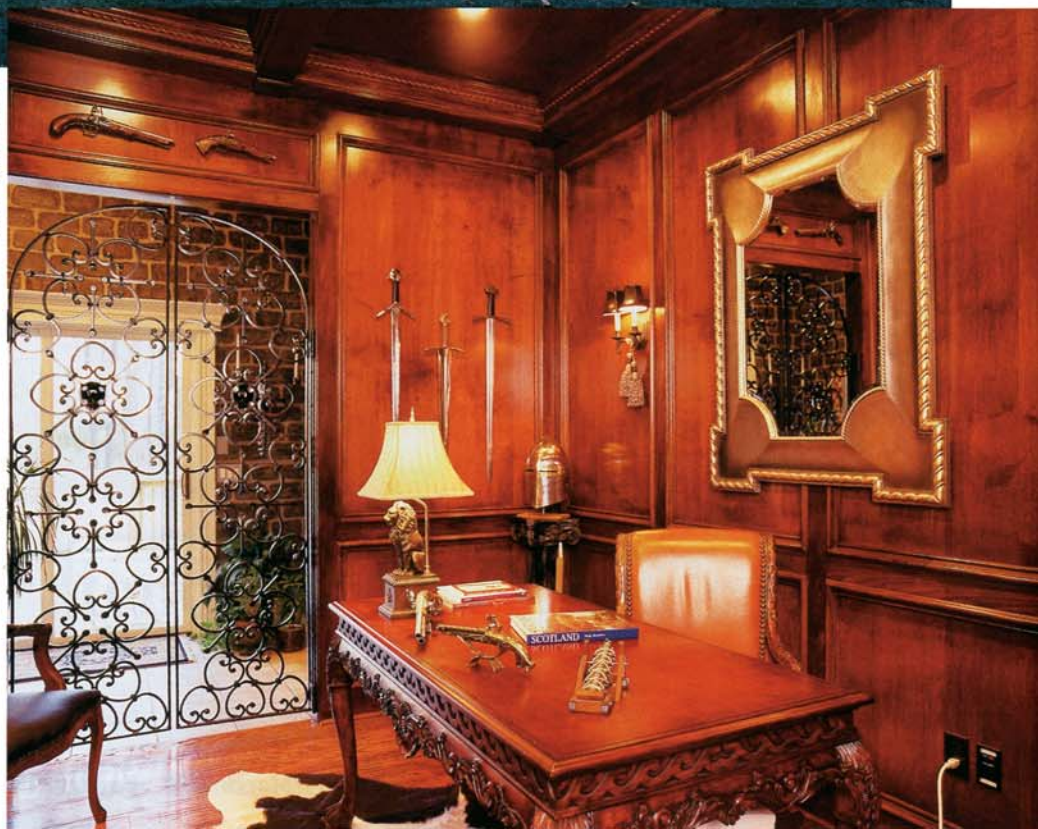


Above: A lovely design by Robert Fillmore Designs of Oklahoma City features brick and stone in a European design. Favorite suppliers are National Home Centers, Petra Stone, Robert Fillmore Designs, and Clayton Tile. Verser Cabinets of Rogers, AR does all of Celtic Construction's cabinetry, and Lee Scarlett calls that shop "The best in Arkansas."

**A**ward-winning, high-end custom home builder Lee Scarlett of Celtic Construction in Fayetteville believes in having a strong and solid foundation. This philosophy permeates not only his company but also the quality homes he builds, his family life and his business and personal friendships.

When you meet Scarlett you discover that you are not only conversing with the company president, but as he says, "Talking with the general contractor, the salesman, the foreman, the secretary and the accountant—it's me.

"I am a small outfit, just me and my wife Scheri, who is the vice president,"





said Scarlett, who offices out of his home. "We have two little daughters—three-year-old Saylor and seven-month-old Sierra—and my wife stays busy taking care of them."

A self-described "hands-on, jeans and T-shirt" kind of guy, Scarlett only builds five or six high-end homes at a time, ranging in square footage from 2,900 to 6,000 feet. The price ranges from \$300,000 to \$675,000. He is partial to English Tudor, Old World, French Country and Italian Renaissance styles, as evidenced by his company slogan—Building on the Tradition of European Quality.

"If it has to do with history it interests me," said Scarlett, who graduated from the University of Nevada-Reno with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and a minor in archeology. "I just don't like building what I call the 'Plain Jane European.' I have never built the same house twice, and to date I have built 35 homes."

Scarlett, 35, has always had a love for homes and a passion for home building.





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“Back in 1979 my father purchased a Victorian home that was built in 1879 by Mr. Bliss, who was the railroad tycoon for the Comstock Load in Virginia City. At the time it was the largest home in the state of Nevada. It later became the Bliss Mansion and is now a state landmark. That experience at an early age gave me an appreciation for homes and history.”

When his parents retired to Harrison, Scarlett joined them in 1991 and proceeded to graduate school at Southwest Missouri State. In January of 1994, with teaching credentials in hand, he came to Fayetteville, where he said, “An opportunity presented itself that I couldn’t resist.” And the rest is history.

Scarlett credits commercial builder Robert Schmitt for convincing him to enter the home building trade and for mentoring him on the in’s and out’s of the business. He plunked down all the money he had in the world, and in the spring of 1995 started working on his first spec house. “Lo and behold, I sold the house before it was finished,” he said. “Then I



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did it again and again.”

In 1997 Scarlett, who is Scottish, formed Celtic (pronounced with a K) Construction.

Building quality and structurally sound homes is Scarlett's trademark, and he said it is his extraordinary subcontractors who "make me shine."

"You are only as good as the company you surround yourself with. I have got the most incredible subcontractors," he said. "I truly believe in the camaraderie of my company. I have used some of the same people for the last eight years.

"Tom Greenway is one of my best friends and I use Verser Cabinets in all my homes. They are the best cabinet shop in Arkansas. They make me look great. I have a wonderful foundation guy—Randy Risley, and the best framer—Tim Moore. My trim carpenter, Jeff Oxford, he is my right-hand man, he is the guy. My painter is Kenny Hankins, and they are just the best; they can do anything with paint. I have got some unbelievable masons, including Casey Curlee; he is not a bricklayer—he is a mason. There is a big difference. He amazes me, and all these guys make me look good.

"My sister's husband Kevin Lambidonis owns Digital Entertainment Systems, and he installs all my security, central vacuums and theatre rooms. Anyone who is anyone around here gets their theaters done by Digital Entertainment Systems. Anything you can imagine, they can do."

Scarlett joined the Northwest Arkansas Home Builders Association in 1999 and last November was elected a state director. He is also a member of the Better Business Bureau.

"I have been in the Parade of Homes the last three years and have won awards for best landscaping, best master bedroom and bath, and best exterior. As far as the building, I take it very seriously. I realize...hey, I am going to do this, this is what I want to do, and this is who I am, so I joined the Associations."

Currently Scarlett, who builds mainly in the Fayetteville and Springdale area, has several homes on the drawing board or nearing completion.

"Right now I am building a custom home for a Wal-Mart executive in Laurel Crossing. I am also building a custom for a retired Air Force Colonel in Ridgemont Estates in Fayetteville. We will break ground on a custom in Stonebriar in Bentonville. That one is going to be 3,400 feet. All three are custom homes."

Covington Park is another subdivision where Scarlett has built a number of homes, which includes his own recently completed 3,400-square-foot custom that he calls "Our cottage in the woods."

"It took about eight-and-a-half months to build," he said. "And it will be my Parade home in 2003. I did some really neat things in this house. Every room has a theme. I wanted to show people that you could do all the quality in a smaller home. Janie Cham-



bers was the interior designer and she made our home a true showplace. This is my model home. This is the home that every client will come in and see to show them what I can do, and I built it with that in mind."

People usually come to Scarlett with their own plans.

"If I am choosing the plan, I have found that eight out of every 10 homes I build are plans from Fillmore Design Group out of Oklahoma City. I love his plans. I think they are wonderful. They can be modified very easily and are true to form. They have an old-world feel. They are a wonderful, wonderful firm."

Scarlett makes it a point to stay on top of the current home building trends.

"Any time I can find something different to put me a step ahead, I try to do it. I attended the national home show in January just because I want to keep abreast of all the new things. If you are going to be a builder and take it seriously you have got to do that. You have got to be able to keep up with your competition or try to stay one step ahead of them, not only in the quality of the construction, but also in the amenities you can put in the home."

Scarlett installs a specially designed (trade secret) air system into his homes.

"The heating and air systems I use cut the dust to three microns in the house, so it is almost dust-free," he said. "It is a special thing I do on the furnace. I also put a cleaning system on the furnace that kills 100 percent of mold, spores and bacteria before they ever get into your air ducts."

From galvanized steel piers and low-e glass windows to Tyvek house wrap, building quality homes is the essence of Celtic Construction.

"Where quality is concerned I will not skimp," said Scarlett. "I honestly care about what I do. My homes are my legacy. When I am not here anymore I hope my grandchildren will drive by and these houses will still be in just as good of shape as they are the day they were done. If you build a quality home and you use the best of everything available at that time, in 20-40 years the home will still be a great home. Styles might change, but you will have an outstanding home if it was done right the first time."

"That is the key—quality. When you buy, one of my homes you are getting a safe, quality-built home that will not only appreciate, but will be a great place for your family. I think that is what makes my homes special. I try to build them with that in mind. Structurally built, they are going to get one of the best homes they could ever find."

Though he is branching out into some rental properties, Scarlett's main focus will continue to be custom homes.

"I have been in the business long enough now to have learned many life lessons. In eight-and-a-half years I have learned a lot about the business, and I think I build a better home today than I did eight years ago, and I think I will build a better home in eight years than I do today."

"As long as people continue buying my homes and coming to me with plans, I will continue to do it because I love it. It is my passion. It makes me happy; I am happiest when I am on the job site with my guys. I don't care if it is snowing or 100 degrees. As long as I am building something I am happy. It is what I love to do."

B/A