

business class



The future is modular

Vancouver Island company in place to meet housing shift

WORDS SEAN MCINTYRE > PHOTOGRAPHY DON DENTON

“Nexus is what’s called a volumetric modular manufacturer. This means we build finished housing with the appliances in place, tiles on the wall, flooring in and cabinetry all done... just place the home, connect it to services and move your furniture in.”

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ky-high home prices, rising interest rates and runaway inflation have forced a full-scale rethink of the housing market. Gone in many areas of the country, it seems, is the dream of owning a single-family detached house; and Southern Vancouver Island is no exception.

In an October article published in *The Globe and Mail*, personal finance columnist Rob Carrick doesn’t mince words about the momentous shift: “The affordability of housing as we knew it is done,” he writes.

A recent report by RBC Economics noted that “buying a home in Canada has never been so unaffordable.”

Making home ownership work from here on out will clearly require many of us to change where we live, what we live in and who we live with. It’s a world in which houses will occupy a smaller footprint and co-housing, multi-family units as well as homes with adjacent garden suites will increasingly become the norm.

Al Jackson, co-founder and president of Cobble Hill-based Nexus Modular, couldn’t possibly have predicted the speed at which these changes would hit society, but he most definitely chose the right time to launch a company that’s managing to check all the right boxes in the new housing reality.

“The problem of housing affordability is not just in the big cities, we are seeing it all across the province and across the country for that matter,” he says. “It requires creative solutions, [including] the realization that we need to live in smaller spaces and, therefore, those spaces need to be very smartly designed and intelligently laid out to make the most use of the space available.”

He adds: “We need to look through a different lens and that’s what we are trying to do here at Nexus as are many others in the housing sector. We absolutely have turned a corner where it is no



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longer a desire to change, but it is a requirement to change the lens through which we look at housing.”

Prior to launching Nexus Modular in 2017, Al was already well established among the Cowichan Valley’s entrepreneurial titans. Al made his name by starting Jackson Grills, a brand of quality barbecues that quickly expanded across North America from its humble roots in the Duncan area. After selling the company to a Lower Mainland-based buyer in 2011, Al pivoted to the booming housing sector, where he got started developing traditional “stick-built” single-detached homes.

Nexus Modular represents the culmination of his experience to date, merging the efficiencies of warehouse manufacturing with the need to meet a changing housing market.

“I came from a process-based manufacturing background and have kept that factory methodology in the back of my mind this whole time,” he says. “Nexus is what’s called a volumetric modular manufacturer. This means we build finished housing with the appliances in place, tiles on the wall, flooring in and cabinetry all done. So, it’s basically just place the home, connect it to services and move your furniture in. The idea behind doing this is to keep all the trades under one roof and help us improve efficiencies of cost and timing.”

This year marks Nexus Modular’s expansion from its original location in Chemainus to a 16,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Cobble Hill. The new headquarters enables each of the tradespeople, craftsmen and designers to work on multiple projects simultaneously under a single roof. The convenience minimizes travel time, eliminates weather-related holdups, and reduces waste associated with the building process. It also makes good business sense as it allows Nexus Modular’s projects to go from inception to completion in a mere 120 days, with only a few days of actual on-site time for delivery of the finished product. For houses built within what he calls the company’s sweet spot—between roughly 400 and 1,700 square feet—Al confidently boasts that a factory-built home can be 10 to 20 per cent less expensive than a conventional home.



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The past few months have seen Nexus Modular working alongside the Cowichan Housing Association to provide local housing options for those who need it the most. The company has also worked with Cowichan Tribes to build upwards of 34 units of housing in a multi-family setting.

Although Nexus can provide suitable and affordable options for a variety of commercial and industrial projects, Al says, the company is housing-focused. Whether a property owner is looking for a principal residence or looking to add an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) to an established site, Nexus Modular has the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of requests.

“There’s lots of options, absolutely,” Al says. “We do a lot of home offices, yoga studios, farm stands—all of those types of applications. We are also involved in multi-family projects, laneway houses and farm-worker housing. We’ve got the ability to look at projects outside of housing and see how the modular approach can fit those situations, but our growth moving forward is housing-focused. The single- and multi-family units are absolutely our core business.”

And don’t let talk of manufactured homes stir up images of drab, utilitarian prefabricated clones. A quick look at some of the company’s completed projects around Southern Vancouver Island or on the Nexus Modular website reveals a stylish and contemporary look that features efficiently designed layouts to make that smaller footprint feel larger.

“One of the cool things about having our in-house design team is that we can control the project,” Al says. “This allows us to create a very traditional product or a very contemporary product. We can really tailor the look and feel of the product to the homeowner’s needs.

“And because we are a Vancouver Island company serving a Vancouver Island base, we have that ability to have that in-person, one-on-one consultation with all of our clients so we can walk the homeowner through the entire process.” **B**



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