

Getting by with a little 'Help' from solar friends

BY SARAH PACHECO

In the famous play *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare questions, "What's in a name?"

Well, when it comes to a company, the name can say it all, which is why Dale Domen made sure he took great care when it came time to pick out the perfect moniker for his solar service business.

"It's all in the name," said Domen, president of Solar Help Hawaii LLC.

"And the key is the 'Help,'" he added. "I wanted 'Help' to be in it to give people the idea that we're not just here to sell new systems; we're here to help people who need help with systems installed by someone else too."

Domen first realized

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there was a huge gap in the solar service industry when he was working at solar panel manufacturer and wholesaler R&R Solar Supply more than 20 years ago.

"In 1990 I started in the solar industry at R&R ... and as we began wholesaling equipment, a lot of homeowners who already had solar systems would come in to purchase parts to repair their systems. After the transaction, they would ask if I knew anyone who could install it for them," Domen recalled.

"Because the industry is fairly new, there's really

no training or schooling for (solar servicing)," he continued. "Some companies outsource or subcontract the installations to other companies, some do it in-house and have installation crews, but a service department is something that most are lacking. It takes more skill to fix an old system than to install a new one. That, together with the fact that there is more profit in new installations causes a lot of companies not to have a good service department."

"On Oahu, out of the many companies in the industry, there are only a handful of solar contractors who actually do service and have someone who can successfully troubleshoot problems with an existing system."

Because Domen had

learned first-hand all sides of the solar industry — from manufacturing solar panels to their distribution and installation — he did have the know-how in these technical matters, and soon he found himself offering his assistance to customers-in-need after-hours.

"I would feel bad for (the homeowners) because they would all say the same thing — they would try to call companies to service or repair their system and were told that (the companies) don't do repairs, or after making an appointment no one would show up," Domen explained. "They worked with a lot of contractors or companies that wanted to sell the new product, but when it came to little repairs, no

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Living up to its name

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one wanted to deal with it.”

Eventually his side job took over as a full-time occupation, and in 2007 Domen founded Solar Help Hawaii. In addition to being on-call to help customers with their existing solar system needs, the company installs brand-new solar hot water systems, solar exhaust fans, photovoltaic (PV) systems, swimming pool heating systems and PV pool pumps.

“Because of my distribution background,” Domen added, “it differentiates us from our competitors. Dealing with

multiple brands, we have the background knowledge of each component’s pros, cons, warranty issues and history. I was kind of able to see what products did well and which ones didn’t, so when we sell our products now, it helps because we combine system packages that are made to withstand the test of time and have the best warranties on the market.”

And that is Domen’s main objective: that Solar Help Hawaii lives up to its name by providing clients the highest standards of service and professionalism, whether it be saving money on their electric

bill or offering a solution to an existing solar system problem.

“I want to make sure that our company will always try to help customers and take responsibility to do repair and service work — doing the smaller stuff that may not have great profit but is so meaningful for consumers who need it,” Domen said.

“Helping is our mission, not just selling new systems.”

For more information about Solar Help Hawaii or to schedule a free consultation, call 548-HELP (548-4357) or visit www.solarhelphawaii.com.

Fabulous furnishings, finishes for all ages

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much of the wall space a relaxing shade of cream, and putting up gorgeous brown cork wallpaper along one wall of the adjoining living and dining rooms.

The living area had a big non-functioning fireplace, but its brown stucco finish made it an eyesore. So, I painted it a beautiful shade of cream, put down some stone tiles and flanked it with new shelving units. I wanted to install a gas insert, but (because of venting issues) opted instead for a decorative look that features candles, a mirror insert and a tempered glass safety screen.

I got rid of the room’s outmoded furniture and put in a three-piece sofa in a resilient, creamy-colored outdoor fabric. I also chose a beautiful brown armchair, a round wooden coffee table and a dent-proof vintage steel footlocker that will

function as a side table.

I then upped the color ante with a beautiful Ikat-patterned fabric that contains shades of blue, green, brown and cream. The material was used to make drapes for both rooms and it served as my jumping-off point for the accent colors in the space. I also put down a rugged, multicolored patchwork rug that can be trusted to hide all manner of kid spills.

In the dining room, I installed a long, durable white vinyl banquette along the cork-papered wall. This banquette will function as part of the seating for a new table that consists of reclaimed wood atop an indestructible steel base.

I chose cool white dining-room chairs and two funky high chairs that can later be converted into toddler chairs. When choosing furnishings for children, I look for durabil-

ity. After all, design is an investment — and it has to grow with you.

I then lightened and brightened the rooms by putting up two industrial-inspired pendant lights above the dining-room table and two lamps on either side of the fireplace.

Lastly, I added a host of accessories — vases, artwork, accent pillows — and made sure the “breakables” were well out of reach of curious little hands.

The verdict? Ignore the naysayers. I say you can have it all — kids and style! By combining resilient yet fashionable fabrics, finishes and furnishings, Nicole and Trevor’s space went from bland to beautiful and is now ready for splendid dinners, relaxing evenings — and a messy tyke or two.

Interior decorator Candice Olson is host of HGTV’s “Candice Tells All.”



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