



Nickerson-Remick



CASE STUDY: RESIDENTIAL

DeStefano Architects

One cold winter day, Lisa DeStefano was headed to a client's house in a development in her native Portsmouth.

"I remember driving through," DeStefano recalls. "There were houses built around them—and all of them had icicles hanging from the roof. Theirs didn't."

Most people wouldn't have noticed, but to DeStefano, a leading Seacoast architect, no icicles means a warmer, more valuable home—less expensive to heat and cool, and one that will remain free of drafts, mold, and ice dams.

That particular house was enjoying the benefits of spray foam insulation, a system used in 95 percent of DeStefano's designs.

"I've been specifying spray foam insulation for 15 years," says DeStefano, who founded DeStefano Architects in 1995. "We always recommend it, and invariably the contractor picks Nickerson Remick."

Spray foam insulation is an increasingly popular choice for those seeking to cut energy costs and reduce their carbon footprint.

DeStefano's longstanding relationship with Nickerson-Remick, the area's leading spray foam provider, comes down to customer service. "For us to succeed, we need to surround ourselves with the best consultants and contractors," DeStefano says. "We can reach out to Nickerson-Remick, get answers, and move on with projects."

These projects include customer-focused homes and buildings. "Our specialty is people spaces: determining the human experience: what people will see when they open a door; or how they will feel when they enter a workplace or a restaurant," DeStefano says. "A design must be beautiful on the landscape, stand the test of time, but above all, meet the needs of the client."

Many of DeStefano's designs (Hilton Garden Inn, Porter Street Condominiums, and soon, the Parade Mall project) have shaped the landscape of downtown Portsmouth.

Living spaces, however, are DeStefano's passion, and in many home designs, spray foam adds to the aesthetic appeal.

"We like our designs to touch all the senses," says DeStefano. "One of

those is warmth, but foam also deadens outside noises." It also gives home a palpable sense of completeness.

"I see the changes homeowners go through during the stages of construction," DeStefano says. "They get excited when the foundation goes in, and when the walls go up, but the home almost doesn't become real until they walk in, feel the warmth and experience the quiet. A foam-insulated home feels more permanent, more secure."

DeStefano usually recommends foam for the entire structure. For the cost conscious, she recommends using foam in the roof, where houses need the most protection—a lesson that New England winters and ocean storms have driven home.

"Houses built on the ocean face a lot of wind-driven rain," says DeStefano, whose "Blue Star" beach home is a famed landmark in Rye. "Traditional fiberglass or bat insulation requires a ridge vent, an open space that allows rain to get into the building. Spray foam guarantees that Mother Nature can't come in through your roof," she says.

DeStefano learned her trade at the Boston Architectural Center, whose curriculum of fulltime work with night and weekend classes resulted in more realistic designs and a deeper understanding of how both projects and building systems work. One can trace geological, economic, and social trends by examining how we insulate buildings, DeStefano says.

"In the 1970s, the Energy Crisis pushed people towards solar power and the sealing of structures, which resulted in mold-spawning moisture and Sick Building Syndrome," DeStefano says. "Then people saw the need to cycle in fresh and vent bad air. And now, high oil prices and climate change are driving "green construction" and the need for sustainability."

The reason DeStefano always pushes for spray foam is how effectively it addresses so many design concerns at once: it makes a tight seal, prevents moisture, needs no venting, and reduces heating and cooling costs. "To me, it's invaluable," she says, admitting that foam's price and dollar value are hard to calculate.

"The return on the investment for comfort is hard to put a value on," DeStefano says. "You can analyze what you save and spend on heating and cooling, but you can't put a price on the level of comfort and the feeling that your house is a more secure home."