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Tiny Heirloom co-founders Jason and Zachary Francis.



Tiny Venture, Big Success

Tiny Heirloom sparks a minimalist revolution, one living space at a time.

BY ERIN J. BERNARD

There's something pretty magical about an idea whose time has come — the past three years have convinced Tiny Heirloom's founders of this much for certain.

Their model of minimalist luxury in tiny home construction struck a cultural chord from the get-go, but don't go asking 24-year-old co-founder Jason Francis about a grand design;

there's never been one — at least not one the Francis family is ready to take much credit for.

"Although we didn't have some great, long-thought-out strategy to start our company when we did, it couldn't have been better planned," he says. "In fact, we believe it was divine timing."

Divine or manmade, this big idea was born, as so many big ideas are, within a

humble garage.

It was 2014, and the Francis family had noticed two things. One: tiny homes were trending in the Pacific Northwest; and, two: a downgrade in quality often accompanied the downgrade in size.

They'd already cut their homebuilding teeth working alongside their general contractor father, and tiny housing seemed poised to make the leap from offbeat trend to lucrative design-and-construction niche. So the Francis siblings rallied their spouses — Brianna Francis, Hannah Francis, and Tyson Spiess — around the challenge of designing and building their own pint-sized dwelling: a movable, slate-colored home Biblically christened "The Genesis."

Their maiden effort boasted high-end materials and a craftsman touch, recalls 22-year-old Zachary: "It was the first tiny home anyone had tried to build as luxurious. Before that, it was, 'How small and how cheap can we make it?' That didn't really speak to us."

Photos of The Genesis quickly went viral, and the whirlwind began. Orders rolled in, and a dozen television production companies

came calling, asking to option a TV show.

Nobody was more surprised than they were, says Jason: "It was a side project. We just wanted to try it out. Once we put [the tiny house] out there and it went wild, we realized that this could be something bigger than what we'd imagined."

Today, Tiny Heirloom custom manufactures a steady stream of movable, high-end homes out of a 16,000-square-foot workspace in Tualatin. Each home is designed to order, with a client's practical and imaginative considerations given equal weight, says Zachary: "People come at it from all angles. Some people want small luxury, and some people are inclined to the simplicity of living in a tiny home."

The homes sell for an average of \$120,000, range from 100 to 400 square feet in size and might feature anything from rock-climbing walls to claw foot tubs to mini-chandeliers.

The Francis family now also stars in its own HGTV reality show, *Tiny Luxury*, currently filming its second season and already slated for a third. The family was slow to warm to the idea of television stardom; now, cameras roll about 15 hours a week, and they kind of love it.

Getting in front of their speedy success has taken this Oregon startup a little help and a whole lot of hustle. At the outset, Tiny Heirloom kept it casual, creating contracts and legal documents piecemeal from Internet templates, but as opportunity (and those production companies) began knocking more insistently, the logistics grew unwieldy.

For help protecting their growing payroll of employees, their vendors and themselves, the Francis family turned to the attorneys at Lane Powell.

From employment contracts and television show negotiations to strategic HR and employee handbook development, Lane Powell has guided Tiny Heirloom through a grab bag of tricky legal issues related to both their business and their unlikely Hollywood foray.

But this is about far more than just red ink. Every legal decision Lane Powell helps Tiny Heirloom make must be squared with the family's ethos of prioritizing relationships, notes Lane Powell Employment Attorney Will Weiner: "Their value system is aligned with treating employees like family as well rather

than like cogs in the system."

Helping a hungry, family-run startup spread its wings entails challenge and reward in equal measure, says Lane Powell Business Attorney Lisa Poplawski: "Tiny Heirloom is a young company both in the sense that it is relatively new, but also in the literal sense that the people who run it are young themselves. They bring an enthusiasm and an energy to addressing and tackling legal issues."

Keeping ahead of growth this lightning-fast is complicated, adds Weiner, but Lane Powell has the knowledge and experience to match that momentum pound for pound: "We're not only looking at pure compliance, but also at growing the business in a positive, vibrant way."

Three years in, Tiny Heirloom's founders view their venture with equal parts homegrown pride and unalloyed wonderment, and they're determined not to lose sight of the values that got them here as they lovingly build movable, minimalist living spaces.

"We want to build something that lasts from generation to generation," says Jason. "We want to be able to create one-of-a-kind designs for customers and their families to cherish." ■

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