

UWO music grad goes green, hosts HGTV shows

by Alyssa Kadansky - Wednesday, June 19, 2013

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University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus Jeff Wilson's life has taken him from the musical stage to the television studio and now on book tours.

Current national spokesman for Thompson's Water Seal, author of *The Greened House Effect*, HGTV and DIY network show host and classical music enthusiast, Wilson molded his bachelor of music degree and background in construction into a career focused on building and renovating energy-efficient homes.

A budding classical pianist, Wilson enrolled at UW Oshkosh as a fourth semester student, having first attended the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. He chose UW Oshkosh for the classically oriented music and recording programs. He earned his bachelor's degree in music in 1992.

"I wanted the classical piano study to help hone my technical ability at my instrument and the recording as a possible career," Wilson said.

Having attempted to study both business and computers, Wilson decided to pursue what he truly had a passion for—music.

"I had decided that I should study something I was really interested in and worry about making a living later," Wilson said. "I'm glad I did—I found the immersion in music exhilarating, and that experience helped to set me up for a life of constant curiosity and study."

While studying music at UWO, Wilson remembers late hours practicing in order to keep up and being constantly exposed to music. Whether he was singing with the Chamber Choir, practicing jazz at The Granary Restaurant or playing in bands, Wilson recalls having a great college experience with influential professors, such as Carl Chapman, Beverly Hassel, Wally Messner and Bruce Wise.

Wilson's passion for classical music earned him his degree, but growing up working on a horse farm in Michigan and helping his family build a passive-solar home fueled his work in construction.

"When I was old enough, my father got me summer jobs in commercial construction," Wilson said. "That experience led me to tell him that I would never go into construction as a career."

After graduation, Wilson took his music and recording education to a Seattle recording studio where he started as an intern and was later hired as an assistant engineer, commercial/jingle-writer and performer and voice-over artist.

This work in recording and his background in music eventually landed him hosting jobs on HGTV and the DIY networks, where he hosted 40 episodes of *Handmade Music*, a show focused on the building of musical instruments.

“I traveled the country showing how musical instruments are built—one of my favorite jobs of all time,” Wilson said.

Wilson’s promise to his father to stay out of construction was futile. He was hired by HGTV to host *Restore America* and the DIY Network to host another 150 episodes on building and, in doing so, was making a living building on TV.

“As I grew older, I found the science and art of building and design fascinating,” Wilson said.

This fascination led to a passion in green home design. He hosted HGTV's *Dream Home* and *Green Home*, which were both a video series. This passion was originally sparked when he became aware of green building in the 1980s, when his father designed and built their passive-solar family home.

“I’ve always been an avid environmentalist and outdoorsman, and I saw our wasteful buildings as one of the biggest culprits in our energy gluttony,” Wilson said. “This affects not only our own pocketbooks and the health and comfort of our families, but also exacerbates the wider problems in our economy, environment and energy security.”

While shooting a documentary on solar energy, Wilson went to a mountain top removal coal mine to see first-hand what burning coal for energy does.

“That was so eye-opening that I decided to try and make a difference in my own life,” Wilson said.

His inspiration led to the deep energy retrofit renovation of his 70-year-old home in order to reduce his family’s energy bills by 85 percent. The renovation is a construction process that uses energy-efficient equipment and a whole-building approach in order to save energy. He tells the story of the reconstruction in his book *The Greened House Effect*.

“It’s a readable narrative that offers up positive, actionable solutions to some of the world’s most pressing problems at a hammer-and-nail level,” Wilson said.

Wilson’s love of music and green construction has led him to do what he loves most, all while inspiring others to help improve the environment. He calls his current career a “happy accident”-- one that has allowed him to pursue his passions.

Today, Wilson lives in Athens, Ohio with his wife and children where he continues to represent Thompson’s Water Seal as well as host HGTV shows about green building and energy-efficient construction.

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