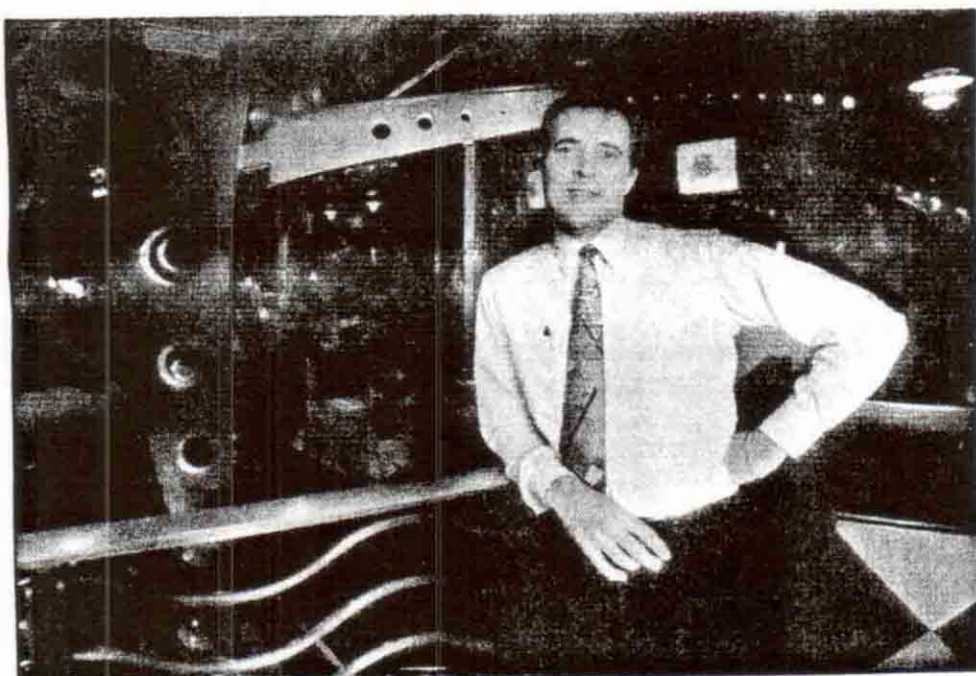


# DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

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FORMERLY MIAMI REVIEW



AIXA MONTERO-GREEN

Douglas Wood, structural engineer, at Planet Hollywood in Coconut Grove: One of his first contracts upon going out on his own was to elevate the roof 11 feet to accommodate a theater atop the celebrity-owned restaurant.

## For Planet Hollywood, he raised high the roof beam

Engineer's early success fueled by storm, celebrities

BY LISA BAERTLEIN  
REVIEW STAFF

**W**HEN Douglas Wood left his position as president of H.J. Ross and Associates in January 1993 to start his own structural engineering firm, it wasn't a move that raised many eyebrows: After 15 years in the business, he wanted to be his own boss.

Since then, however, he has raised the roof — for the Mayfair Theater in Miami's Coconut Grove.

That is, his structural engineering firm worked out a plan to elevate the Mayfair mall's 2,000-ton roof by 11 feet to accommodate a theater being built atop his restaurant project, Planet Hollywood.

Wood's firm was just a few months old when it nabbed the \$60,000 Planet Hollywood/Mayfair contract from Mayfair Holdings Ltd. and Planet Hollywood in 1993.

"Like only a handful of engineers, he's

inventive. He looks for solutions rather than for the easiest thing to do," said John Fullerton, president of Fullerton Diaz Revuelta, the architectural firm that recently awarded Wood's company a pro bono contract to do the structural engineering for upcoming renovations to Coral Gables' Miracle Theater.

Wood, 39, had joined H.J. Ross right after graduating from the University of Wyoming with a degree in structural engineering. He was the company's president for two years when he left for a reason most corporate brass can understand: "I didn't own it."

A personal investment of \$15,000, a one-room office in Coral Gables and about \$45,000 in pre-arranged work bought him that ownership.

It was a relatively easy move. He said he acquired a "pretty good overview of the entire practice" while working at H.J. Ross, and that the startup for a structural

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engineering firm isn't capital intensive — books, furniture and software being the major expenditures.

"I've been busy from Day 1," said Wood, who found the cost of professional liability insurance about the most painful part of the transition, since structural engineers pay one of the highest rates of all professionals.

But he had an intangible asset — contacts, which he said haven't waned since starting out on his own.

Walter Revell, chairman and chief executive of H.J. Ross, said that like many structural engineers who decide to "hang a shingle," Wood maintained a good rapport with his former employer and clients. And his timing was right, said Revell, who was Florida's secretary of transportation from 1972 until 1975. Wood started up in the post-Hurricane Andrew construction boom.

With H.J. Ross as his largest customer, Wood said he was generating income within his first month of business. After six months he hired an associate and started paying himself. And during the first year, Douglas Wood & Associates' contracts brought in \$140,000 — topping Wood's \$100,000 goal.

He added a second associate and

moved into a bigger space in 1994, when he tallied up \$225,000 in contracts.

Wood said most of his business is generated by repeat customers, but that he spends two or three hours a week marketing his services, which include structural design, inspections and feasibility studies for a variety of clients in

the government, private and commercial sectors.

This year, the firm is likely to add another associate and increase revenues to around \$275,000. Wood said he'll continue to expand the firm "but only with quality work and clients. We want to be considered the best, but not the biggest."

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