

Dare to Dream



By Matt Powers

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CUSTOM BUILDERS HAVE THE GOOD fortune to work with many different types of clients on many different types of projects. Our job as the facilitator is to find out what is important to that client and how they best like to communicate. For some, having good references, communication skills, and abilities is enough. However, what makes our job truly special is those that come to us with a dream. As a custom builder, we are entrusted to make those dreams come true.

The home in this feature tells the story of a vision and dream that has been built over two diverse lifetimes of experiences and travels. The husband came from a Louisiana upbringing to

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found a successful Houston based oil firm, and the wife grew up in the foreign land of Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea to become an interior design student at the Houston Art Institute. Our task was to take their dreams and help transform them into a one-of-a-kind marvel.

Unique to this project for our firm is the client. While I mentioned that she was completing her interior design degree at the Art Institute, what I failed to mention is her vision and artistic abilities that exceeded any client with whom we probably have ever worked. Part of her dream was to be involved in every part of the process. She became part of the central design team, working side by side with John Sullivan of Sullivan-Henry-Oggero on the plan development from the beginning.

To complete the design team, we introduced lifelong friend and respected fixture in the Houston interior designer community, Bobby Farkus, ASID. The client added friend and interior designer Elizabeth Koval, ASID, to the team. While most builders shudder at the thought of three interior designers working on one project, I believe the end result is



testimony to the adage “iron sharpens iron.” Many ideas and avenues were explored that might never have been considered without each of their vision and resources.

To begin our tour of the home, one must begin on the exterior with the formal gardens, wrought iron, and fountain framing a formal French Estate. Light stucco colors provide the base to a formal entry of cast stone that also accents the cornice detail throughout the home. The windows and doors by Eagle Manufacturing have two separate colors to highlight differing architectural details.

Upon entering, the grand two-story entry is highlighted by the floating staircase. The wrought iron was custom designed by the homeowner and manufactured by Universal Ornaments. Each riser on the staircase is illuminated with LED lighting for both safety and

elegant ambiance in the evening. The crystal chandelier from Thomas Grant, adorns the ceiling; its size artfully matches the scale of the entry. Cleaning and maintenance are easily performed with an electronic pulley system that lowers the fixture on command. Keeping with the artistic theme, Leslie Sinclair of Segretto Finishes conceived a beautiful wall texture and finish of a diamond plaster with all over stencil. The finish beautifully provides a rich deep texture as well as reflective quality to complete the entry.

The formal dining room is centered on a gorgeous Baccarat crystal chandelier. Every detail of this elegant room is well planned; drapery pockets were custom built to hide the hardware for hanging the drapes. Cove lighting was installed to provide indirect ambient lighting, and felt lined silver trays were constructed to house the silver. The room is topped off by a set of custom leaded glass doors that provide the richness of the room.



The formal powder room off the main entry is truly a work of art. All of the trim and cabinetry in the home was custom built by Domingo Vasquez. In this room his cabinet, which is designed as a piece of furniture, is topped with Onyx Stone from Designer Stone. The beauty of the stone is its translucency which we were able to highlight by under lighting the stone to provide a remarkable visual representation of the veining and character of the stone. The mirrors installed by Mirror Gallery are German Antique on the back and to the sides of the vanity. An additional designer mirror was suspended over the vanity itself.

The kitchen is a central focus and hub of the home. The client wanted a European Culinary kitchen that would entertain both the younger and executive crowd. Open to the family room with views to the cabana and pool, the chef and those being entertained always feel included in the party. To help define

the cooking area, we constructed a drop-down walnut ceiling over the island area. The ceiling is lighted with two silk shaded pendant lights and recess lighting. The walnut island is topped with Blue Bahia Granite and a food safe tea stained butcher block. In the island within arms length from the Herbeau Farm sink, the chef has access to two Miele dishwashers, a drop-in Wolf steamer, slide out towel and soap accessory cabinets, and a divided recycling center. Other features include a Subzero refrigerator/freezer, icemaker, and wine cooler. Central to the kitchen's completion is the La Cornue Grand Palais Range. Built in France, the range even includes a brass nameplate with the clients name and year it was custom built for them. Keeping with the European market theme, Freebird Glass provided a whimsically etched glass entry door with "Pantry" inscribed in the glass. Aside from customized storage, the pantry also features a painted magnetic wall to attach recipes and those important notes and reminders.

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As the client starts her new interior design business, one room she holds dear is her studio. It is located upstairs and functions as an area to receive clients with lots of natural lighting provided by two operable French doors that open onto balconies. However, hidden within the closet is a complete roll out work area. It includes two roll out cabinets and a roll out work-table. The interior of the closet has custom painted pegboard and shelving to store supplies and equipment. Even while open, the closet has design detail with decorative wallpaper on the rear that connects with the room’s theme.

The Master Retreat is truly something special. The client’s original desire was to have a spacious contemporary retreat complimenting the home’s French design with separate vanities and facilities, a central tub, and substantial storage. The result is a 400+ square foot two-story retreat built around a six foot lighted therapeutic air tub. From the tub the homeowner can enjoy the “floating” marble encased flat screen television suspended on the glass shower wall. Each shower wall and the barrel ceiling are adorned with glass geometric tiles. The lantern chandelier that is suspended over the tub area and the trimmed soffit which surrounds the room at the top of the shower provide a break in the two-story wall height and create intimacy in the vanity areas. The vanities and the linen cabinets all have the “x” design that is replicated throughout the home. For the vanities, each is made of four hand-cut beveled mirror triangles by Mirror Gallery.



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Another retreat for the whole family is the media room located upstairs. Platform seating, Fiber optic ceiling lighting, and a commercial quality audio and video make this a room to entertain and create family memories.

Memories are also prevalent in the custom bar area off the main family room. The client has preserved wine corks from special trips and functions around the world. These were carefully crafted into an artistic backsplash. The client spent hours carefully laying out each cork and placing them into their new cherished display. The bottle storage area behind the bar is



again illuminated on the sides with onyx panels that are backlit. These panels were mounted on hinges to facilitate service to the electrical equipment.

Many other features included in this home help to make what started as a dream into a reality. There are items such as a 200-gallon salt-water fish aquarium from nationally recognized ADQ located in the billiard room; a custom designed aromatic groin vaulted wet sauna located in the pool bath; a Tiffany and Company inspired secondary bathroom for the daughter complete with a Kohler LED color changing rainbow



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showerhead, Tiffany sconces, and Swarovski crystal hardware. The shower walls are made up of a mosaic of Thorn-tree's Vision glass tile. Each tile is individually placed to simulate a rain shower.

As a custom builder we are often asked what makes your homes custom or different than all of the others. While that definition may vary from builder to builder, I think what makes our firm special is our team. We are uniquely positioned to provide the level of service the client needs

to fulfill their dream. Not every home has the complication and level of complexity as this French Estate; however, knowing that the team has the resources and talent to build the best and provide you with the level of service and direction you need is a comfort that can not be replaced.

I personally invite you to give us a call to see how we might serve you in the Houston area and also to tell you about some of our exciting new subdivision locations in north Houston near the new Exxon Campus. ■