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Making Your Dream Home a Reality

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HOW TO DESIGN AND BUILD A CUSTOM HOME

It's where inspiration meets aspiration. Few people reach the point when they can collaborate with architects and builders to create their own custom home. For those who do, objective advice is hard to find. Professionals who would not spend a dime of company funds without the proper information are forced to go with gut feelings when it comes to their largest personal investment: their family's home.

Coupled with the high price of home sites, these residences can cost upwards of \$1 million. New architects and struggling builders anxious to cut their teeth on big projects often slice their rates to land their first "big one." Too often, the project fails. With hundreds of thousands of dollars invested, not to mention time, energy, and wasted dreams, the customer winds up with a half-built home, an expensive set of ar-

chitectural drawings, and a bankrupt builder or remodeler who has left town.

If you don't have the information you

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need, your dream could become your worst nightmare. It happens all the time.

To guide you through the process, Orren Pickell Designers & Builders has created an insightful series of articles.

UPCOMING ARTICLES INCLUDE:

- The Look of Luxury:
Residential Architectural Styles
- Form or Function?
Hiring an Interior Designer
- Luxurious Surroundings:
Outdoor Living and Landscape Architecture
- Dream Kitchens
- The Ultimate Bathroom
- Seeing the Light:
Lighting, Low Voltage, and Technology
- An Open and Shut Case:
Incorporating Windows and Doors
- Finishing Touches:
Unique Architectural Details
- Down The Road:
Building with the Future in Mind

Luxury Defined



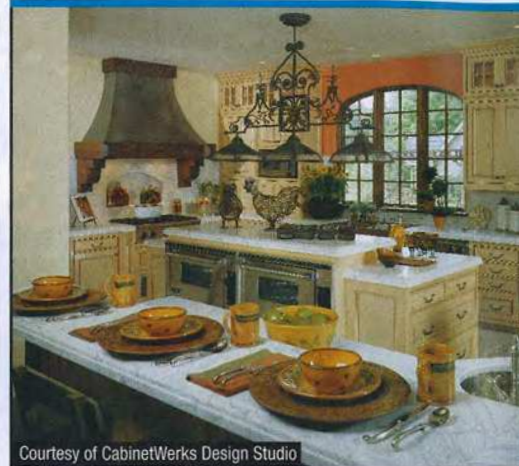
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Since no two custom homes are the same, writing all-inclusive essays is not an easy task. Please know that we have attempted to make these articles as accurate and unbiased as possible. We hope that, for homeowners about to design and build, they will help fill the knowledge gap. Written by experts at Orren Pickell Designers & Builders, these articles will guide you through the fun, yet challenging process of custom homebuilding.

SITE SELECTION

First, you need to pick a site for your home, selecting the ideal neighborhood and address. As with our company, your design/builder might offer to help you, step-by-step, through this process. It is important to do a full inspection of the lot, noting possible issues related to drainage and zoning. It also helps to map the property's topography, including hills, trees, and ponds. But before you can proceed, you need to find the right real estate lawyer, realtor, architect, and builder.

To select a realtor and attorney, we recommend finding professionals with knowledge of the local area and with whom you feel comfortable working.

THE CASE FOR A DESIGN/BUILD FIRM

Choosing an architect and a custom builder can be more complicated, especially when trying to estimate costs. The price of a custom home is based on architectural fees, the complexity of the architectural plan, and the cost of materials used. The materials' cost can vary according to the size of the house and the price of materials chosen by the homeowner.

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charge more than 13 percent of the total cost of the house, while an architectural firm that is part of a custom-building company may charge as little as half of that. On a \$1 million house, that's a difference of \$60,000 to \$70,000. Why the difference?

Architects will be quick to tell you that you get what you pay for. Having won more awards of excellence for custom homes than any residential architectural firm in Illinois, we know this is not always the case. Architects charge more because that is how they make most of their revenue. Design/build firms charge less for their architectural drawings because they make most of their revenue in construction.

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What's more, our experience tells us that many architects frequently "overdraw" homes. They don't stick to a real budget because they aren't responsible for building. If the house designed takes longer than anticipated to build, then that becomes the builder's problem. Of course the builder will say it is the architect's problem. Ultimately, it becomes your problem because you will pay a higher



Courtesy of Orren Pickell Designers & Builders



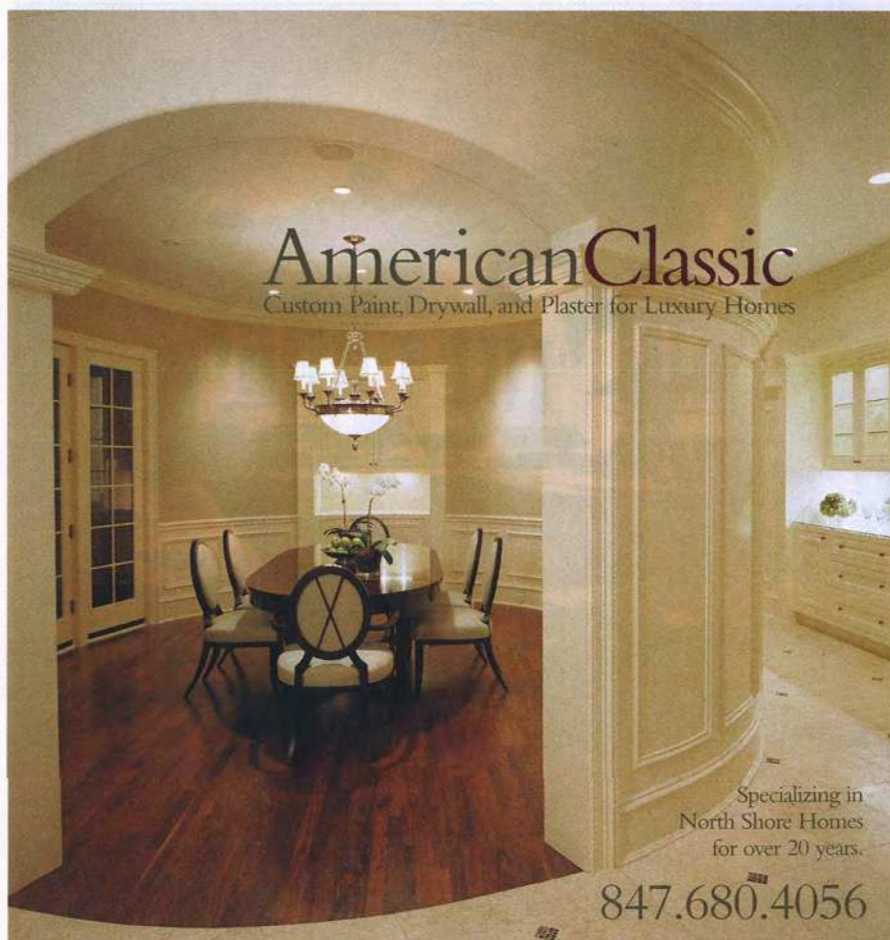
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bill. Problems like this are eliminated in design/build firms, where there is constant communication between the architect and builder and where the ultimate goal is not just to create an imaginative design, but to design and build a dream home.

We recommend you choose an experienced, recognized design/build firm. If you decide on one of the best, you can rest assured that you will also get an extremely creative, highly professional architectural design. We feel that our architects are second to none. The proof is in our awards.

SELECTING A CUSTOM BUILDER OR DESIGN/BUILD FIRM

Where do you start? Whom do you ask for recommendations? Call the Home Builders Association of Greater Chicago. Call the building department of the city or village you want to live in. Talk to friends



Courtesy of Orren Pickell Designers & Builders; photo: Linda Oyama Bryan

who have built. Talk to local realtors, real estate attorneys, and bankers in the area. You should quickly build a list of at least three or four outstanding custom builders.

It is important to note that while you always want a great value, you may not want the lowest price. Custom builders usually begin as tiny one- or two-person architectural firms or individual builders working out of a truck. Frequently, these very small firms will slash their prices in order to get the job. It is tempting to work with these firms, especially if the people are nice, honest, and hardworking. Tempting, but risky. If the owner catches the flu, takes a vacation, burns out, or even does well and becomes burdened by additional jobs, then your project will stall and your costs will skyrocket. Even more frightening, if the small builder is stretched too thin or if the bank calls in its loan, they could go bankrupt in the middle of your project. Even if they initially quoted you a rock-bottom price

to get your project, they will either have to raise your price or go bankrupt once the bills come in. Either way, you lose.

We recommend you pick among better-known, long-respected custom building or remodeling companies. The quote may be a bit higher, but in the end, you will pay about the same as the smaller or newer builders, without the risk. You will be sure to acquire the longevity and

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investment potential you want from your home. When you select a specific company, consider factors like chemistry, financial stability, and reputation for quality, timeliness, and service. These factors determine your custom-building experience and your final satisfaction.

Most importantly, check out the final product. Call each builder's reference list to ask about the feelings and experiences of the homeowners. Also, visit homes built 5 to 10 years ago to assess style and quality. Pay keen attention to the details. Do corners fit perfectly? How high is the quality of the wood-working? Do you like the traffic flow in the house? See if these homes match your expectations. In the end, you want to work with the design/builder or architect and custom builder who will create the home of your dreams, not someone else's dreams.

By partnering with an experienced design/build firm, not only will you get the most bang for your buck, but you will have the best chance of getting the home you really want. It's your least risky, most sound investment.

**For more information please visit
www.pickellbuilders.com.**