

BUILDING ICONS

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'emeralds' to a diverse range
of homeowners. Page 14

Exceeding Expectations

Orren Pickell Building Group thrives on the challenge of customizing every client's home and making the process enjoyable. **BY JANICE HOPPE-SPIERS**

“I’m trying to get much better at designing and building homes that are headache-free, beautiful and stand the test of time.”

ORREN PICKELL, OWNER



Orren Pickell Building Group is recognized as one of the Midwest's premier designers and builders.

PROFILE

ORREN PICKELL BUILDING GROUP
www.pickellbuilders.com / Headquarters:
Northfield, Ill. / Employees: 35

Orren Pickell Building Group long ago developed a process for custom luxury homebuilding and remodeling that it sticks to on every new project. That doesn't mean, however, that the leadership doesn't know how to have a little fun while creating memorable residences and experiences.

“When you are designing a home for someone or building an addition, there are a lot of decisions to be made, so we try to manage our clients in a playful way through a process we have already designed,” owner Orren Pickell explains.

Today, Orren Pickell Building Group is recognized as one of the Midwest's premiere designers and builders. “Orren is heavily involved in the process and that's one thing he does best is make the process fun so our clients get what they want,”

PROCESS TO PROCESS

Although going through the homebuilding process can be stressful, Vari takes steps to ensure the experience is relaxing and stress-free for his clients. "Building is a process," Vari notes. "And we just take it one process at a time."

The first and most important process is the elevation or look that the customer is wanting. A home with elegant curb appeal is the envy of every neighborhood. Alexi Development has a designer dedicated to walking clients through the selections such as choosing cabinets.

Additionally, the designer will help choose other suppliers, helping select high-end materials such as quartz countertops, Italian marble floors, exotic wood flooring and high-end appliances. Vari notes high-end materials are part of a larger trend he sees in luxury homebuilding; it is all about the quality.

"The buyers in this market want all of the bells and whistles," Vari notes. "They really want quality, custom cabinets, wood flooring, high-end appliances and materials that are maintenance free. All of our homes are built with brick, stone or cement board siding."

While Alexi Development's clients demand beautiful homes

above ground, they also get something else not necessarily visible from the street: completed, fully functional basements. "Most basements we build have a family room, a full bathroom, a bedroom, kitchen, movie theater and a wet bar," Vari explains. "It is important to understand my customers' needs and maximize every space within the home."

Although Alexi's customers enjoy luxurious spaces, Vari notes that what they really like is having technology at their fingertips. "Our customers want to be able to do everything from their smartphones," Vari says. "Whether it be closing the garage door, adjusting the temperature, or being able to see what the kids are doing, smart technology really resonates with today's buyers." ■

/Insignia Stone and Pyramid Custom Cabinets/ Each with over 25 years of experience, Insignia Stone and Pyramid Custom Cabinets are proud to partner with Alexi Development. Working closely with homeowners and builders, they pride themselves on creating an excellent experience for their customers.

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says John Forehand, president. "It's a real honor to work with our clients who put a lot of trust in us and I'm most proud of working with the team and building the best homes we can."

Orren Pickell Building Group is a one-stop design/build firm specializing in custom-built luxury homes and remodeling projects throughout Chicago, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana. The company self-performs a majority of the work, including kitchen, bath, cabinetry, carpentry and home maintenance.

"As the owner, I'm trying to continually get better at what we do," Pickell says. "I'm trying to get much better at designing and building homes that are headache-free, beautiful and stand the test of time. I'm working at trying to make it a more fun process for people who don't need to do this – they don't need to build a house, but are doing it because it's entertainment. I'm trying to get better and be more entertaining."

BUILT TO LAST

Orren Pickell Design Group is focused on building homes that have longevity. "We have been thinking about that a lot in terms of details," Forehand says. "Maybe it's not all about the bells and whistles but materials that are going to last."

When building a new home, Forehand says his inspiration comes from architects like Howard Van Doren Shaw who built homes in the 1920s on Chicago's North Shore, which consists of many affluent suburbs north of the city. "We try to take some of those inspirations into our new homes, whether they are traditional or contemporary homes," he adds. "That time in Chicago on the North Shore has some of the greatest architecture ever put together."

The company also gives its clients a little homework. Each homeowner is given a wish list to consider what is most important and is asked to bring in dozens of pictures. "My inspiration personally comes from asking the client to do that homework," Pickell says. "Some of the pictures they bring in are things we have done in the past and I look for similarities and patterns in the photos. We go through what they are looking for in their life, what the floor plan should look like and the views we will have on the site."

In terms of really unique pieces, one homeowner is a chemist and the company used a chemical hood for the bar to create a labyrinth. The barstools are models of a virus. Another homeowner has a vast art collection and likes to change out the pieces regularly. Orren Pickell Building Group created a gallery in the lower level of the home and is developing a hassle-free way for the artwork to

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"Congratulations to Orren Pickell and his team for a job well done."



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ORREN PICKELL BUILDING

rotate. "That's what makes doing these homes fun," Forehand adds. "They bring their vision to us and we make it a reality."

TRANSPARENT PROCESS

Orren Pickell Building Group redeveloped its website about a decade ago to improve communication, transparency and reference past projects. "Because we have a great website we can communicate real-time information with our customers in terms of costs, planning and specs," Pickell explains. "Most projects are OpenBook to our clients and we have won national awards for our website."

Pickell says its online-only system also reduces paper waste. "If you have 75 projects going on at one time and each has a 40-page spec being printed once a week, that's reams of paper," he explains. "The seven days between the decision to make a change and its communication to all of the subs in the field was a risky period. Now the communication to everyone involved, including the homeowner to the superintendent, project manager, interior designer and subcontractors is real-time."

Customers are trained on how to use the website as that's a key way the company communicates with them.

"You can access the website anywhere in the world and see images of your home being built," Pickell adds. "In 10 years if you want to put an addition on, we can access everything that went into building the house, such as caulk, plumbing, the color of the bathroom, etc. This is the best site and everyone loves it."

Moving forward, Orren Pickell Building Group will continue to focus on getting better every day while bringing down the cost of building a home. "We are trying to be twice as fast because people want us out of their hair," Pickell says. "I'm trying to get better, be more entertaining and put out a better quality product." ■



Orren Pickell Design Group is focused on creating homes that have longevity with quality details and materials that will last.