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Innovation, Creativity Distinguish
Covington Custom Builders' Homes

Covington Custom Builders | Houston, Texas



Innovation, Creativity Distinguish Covington Custom Builders' Homes

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

After 23 years of building, Robert and Mina Covington, owners of Covington Custom Builders, still find it is a lot of fun to create houses. “We put a lot of heart and soul and thought into every project. We put time and effort into being unique and marketable,” Robert stated.

“We try to stay a little bit out in front of the market, on the cutting edge of putting interesting finishes in our spec homes,” he added. Right now they have four speculative houses in West University at or near completion that they’re very proud of and are listed in MLS.

Although the Covingtons work with interior designers, especially on pre-sold custom homes, they do most of the design work themselves on their spec homes. “We love to have people walk through our spec houses and say ‘Wow! This is great!’ We love to bring all of our creativity into a completed house.”

However, “if we put something in there and it’s not working, we redesign it. Right now [during this interview] we have six magazines and books open on the coffee table

looking at fixtures. We never stop looking for ideas.”

Of course they will build whatever a customer wants in a custom home. And they will work with whatever architect and interior designers their customer chooses, they emphasized.

They focus on the “high-end, typical tear-down areas” of Houston, such as West University, Southampton and Memorial Areas. “It’s very competitive in those areas of Houston because so many people want to build there. If you’re very well known in those areas, it helps a lot,” stated Robert.

“Because of the quantity of homes we have built in Houston over the last 20 years, we understand the market we build in very well,” he added. The market conditions in the area control the price range and size of their projects.

“Right now the market is really hot,” Robert noted. Consequently, Covington Builders is constructing mostly speculative homes. At other times, when the market is cool,



the company constructs pre-sold custom homes exclusively.

“Because we are in a hot market the land is very hard to get. We buy the land sometimes; other times the customer already has a lot.” The Covingtons work with many different realtors. In addition, Mina Covington is a realtor.

Although they build high-end custom and speculative homes, the Covingtons are cost-conscious, working with their customers to keep costs down: “Even on a big house, you can’t get everything you want,” according to Robert.

“Contractors get thrown a lot of curve balls in the high-end custom home market. It’s hard for customers to visualize the size and feel of a space when it’s two-dimensional on paper. The single most challenging thing of being a builder is trying to communicate what something is going to look like or feel like to match what the customer wants when it is built and becomes three-dimensional.”

He said they’ve had to redesign spaces from master closets to kitchens when they were near completion because the clients didn’t like the space. “We don’t punish clients who make changes. If you have ‘custom’ in your name, you should be willing to make changes for the customer,” Robert said.





“We will come back and tweak things for a while after they move in.” Although some clients expect next-day completion of the work, Robert said that isn’t always possible because of schedules in securing materials and tradesmen. “We always want to come back and take care of people. That commitment has helped us maintain our reputation.”

They steer their customers to vendors and products based on quality and price. “We work for our customers, and we want them to get the best deal possible. We work to give them what they want without overspending.”

Because both Robert and Mina are confessed people-pleasers, they like to make their clients happy. Holding a degree in psychology from Louisiana State University, Robert especially enjoys the sales elements of building. A pharmacist by training, Mina handles the office and customers’ selection process. Covington Builders also employs a field project manager.

Robert and Mina work together all day every day and then go home to their 4,500-sq.-ft. living quarters above their office, a space that they share with their three daughters. (Two attend the University of Alabama, and one is in high school.) While living in a commercial section of town is not typical of the way Houstonians live, it works for their family.

They learned to control their risks after the economic downturn of 2008 and multiple hurricanes and tropical storms in that same period. “I thought I had the world by the tail in 2007, but I’m no longer over-confident. I will never take my status for granted again. Back then I was mowing yards at my properties just to have something to do. After years of ups and downs, I cannot guarantee the market, but I’ve learned to put myself at the least risk possible,” Robert said.

“My advice to younger builders is to remember that a house

The Covingtons see themselves as partners with their customers in the building process for the five to seven houses they erect each year. “We’re very honest. We work hard. We give value for the money.” They said they try to make it a policy to take care of customers beyond what they expect. “People’s level of satisfaction is conditional, based on their expectations.” Robert noted.



is the largest purchase most people ever make, and that it deserves to be treated as such. Building a custom home for a family is a privilege, so make sure to care for the project throughout each step.”

Despite having been through the ups and downs of the construction industry, Robert said he will always build houses. However, he may build fewer houses in the next few years and concentrate on houses where he and Mina can let their creativity and innovation continue to shine.

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