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Sierra Classic's Performance
Built on Process, People

Sierra Classic Custom Homes | Houston, Texas



Sierra Classic's Performance Built on Process, People

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Ron Chamberlain, president of Sierra Classic Custom Homes, can readily identify why his company is successful. "What really makes a difference from builder to builder is their process and their people."

Sierra Classic, a design-build firm, uses an eight-step building process to make the process smoother for everyone, according to Chamberlain. "Building a custom home can feel like an overwhelming, complicated process – but it doesn't have to be."

From the initial meeting to discuss ideas, through the site evaluation to the construction and completion phases, the Sierra Classic staff focuses on the buyer's comfort, making sure there are no unknowns to surprise or overwhelm the buyer. "We try to keep the process simple and transparent."

But the company's success is also about the synergy and teamwork found in its staff of 26. "We have an amazing group of people, and everyone at Sierra works together to get the job done," stated Chamberlain.

Offering a full turn-key operation, the staff includes four employees who handle administrative duties, including accounting, permitting, homeowner associations, review boards, utilities and all other bureaucracies. They also support the nine builders in the field, each of whom typically manages the construction of five to eight houses. Sierra Classics also has a design coordinator to assist clients through the design of their new home blueprints.

Additionally, eight sales consultants work from model homes in five locations. Those sales consultants really drive the process and "hold the buyers' hand" throughout the construction process, Ron said. Rounding out the staff is a management team which includes Kip Miller, chief executive officer; Joanie Ramser, vice president and co-owner; David Ellison, vice president of sales; and Chamberlain.

Additionally, Sierra Classic partners with two outside design companies whose associates help buyers make their finish selections. Buyers visit Expressions Home Gallery



for appliances and lighting and Flooring Services-Design Gallery for all remaining design finishes.

The company typically builds 50 to 60 houses each year, mostly single story homes of 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. on acreage in the Houston, Austin and San Antonio areas. About half of the homes Sierra Classic builds are in the greater Houston area, and the other half are in the San Antonio and Austin areas.

“Our primary focus is building homes on land the buyers own. Although we typically do not have land for sale, we do have resources to assist buyers that need to find land to build their new dream home,” Chamberlain said.

Because Sierra Classic builds almost exclusively on acreage properties, it’s now following the land, expanding north of Houston to College Station and Huntsville, where it has a model home. It’s also building west and south of Austin.



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Many buyers are Baby Boomer empty nesters buying their final homes, according to Chamberlain. “The majority of our Hill Country buyers come from Houston. They buy a nice piece of land for their retirement years.” They no longer have to worry about commuting to the city and are seeking big, open-style floor plans.

“Many people start with our customizable plans to stimulate ideas and visualize their perfect dream home,” Ron said. Most of its buyers choose to customize plans from the company library of more than 100 copyrighted designs, although some buyers bring in their own plans or will use Sierra Classic’s in-house design team to create an original floor plan.

Although most of the house plans have only three bedrooms, about one-fourth of the houses now include a guest house, perhaps because a model homes is set up in that style, prompting more buyers to request it, Ron said.

The majority of the homes fall in the \$450,000 to \$750,000 range, although some are more than \$1 million. Those costs do not include the land or site work, he noted.

To familiarize prospective buyers with the design-build process, Sierra Classic offers a two-hour, multi-media “Build on Your Lot” seminar in each of its markets every

quarter. Its industry panel, led by Chamberlain, discusses construction, financing, site evaluations, design and more.

“We’ve been doing these seminars for more than 10 years. Those attending consistently become buyers. The seminars give them comfort in how the business is run,” the company president stated. A big part of the seminar stresses the importance of choosing a financially stable company to build the buyers’ homes. Sierra has successfully weathered the volatile housing market for over 20 years, due in no small part to its conservative financial practices.

To ensure that they’re meeting the customers’ expectations, Sierra Classic uses a third party – GuildQuality – to gather reviews from its buyers at four times during the process: contract, sheetrock (or halfway through construction), completion (two weeks after move-in) and 12 months later. The staff reviews the results monthly to help them deliver excellent customer satisfaction.

Miller and Ramser began Sierra Classic Custom Homes as a production builder in 1989 in Houston. By 1997 the company had evolved into a build-on-your-lot entity and then expanded to the Hill Country in 2004 by constructing a single model home in Wimberley. Just five years later the production in the Hill Country market was matching the Houston market. The Hill Country market is now expanding south to San Antonio and north to “the South



Austin market,” as Chamberlain termed it.

In the future Ron envisions increasing production to as many as 150 homes a year, but not so many that he’d lose touch with his customers. “We’re the perfect size – big enough to be competitive but small enough to make sure our buyers get the custom home experience.”

Chamberlain joined the company in 2006 as the sales manager after working in sales for a production builder, History Maker Homes, and in auto finance. He moved up the ranks from sales to vice president of operations and ultimately to president.

Ron said he loves the challenges of working in the custom home industry, most notably taking an intangible concept to a finished product. Claiming that he is married to his work, in his spare time he spends a lot of time studying business management and the building industry. He is accredited as a Graduate Master Builder and a Certified Green Builder by the National Association of Home Builders.

For more information contact Sierra Classic Custom Homes by emailing info@sierraclassic.com or visiting the website at www.sierraclassic.com. You may also call the Houston division office at 281-391-1303 or the Hill Country division office at 830-629-6600.



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