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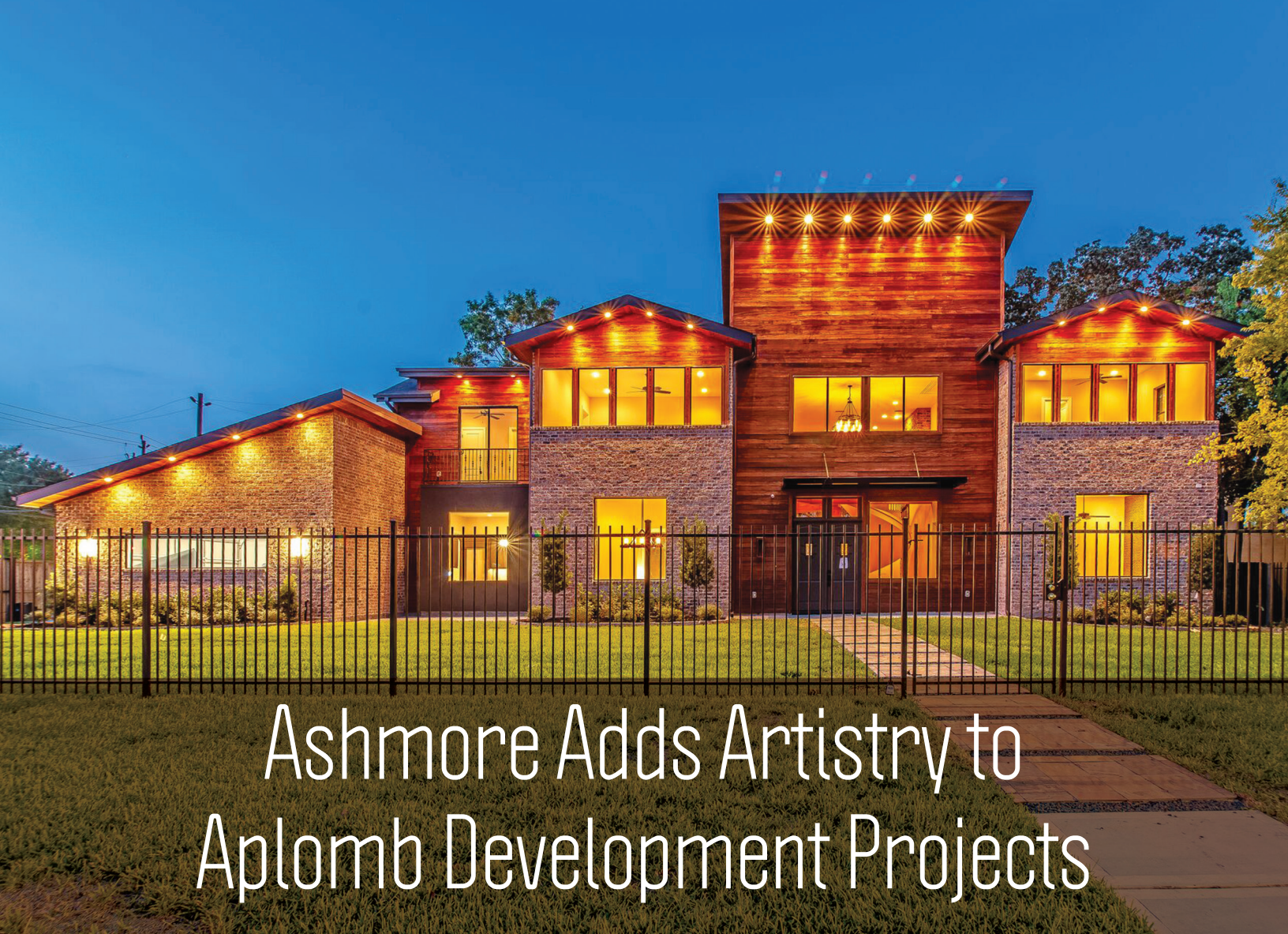
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Ashmore Adds Artistry to  
Aplomb Development Projects

Aplomb Development Company | Houston, Texas



# Ashmore Adds Artistry to Aplomb Development Projects

**By Kathy Bowen Stolz**

An artist's eye. A builder's skill. A psychologist's insight. An out-of-the-box thinker. That's the description of Mike Ashmore, president of Aplomb Development Co., a design/build firm.

Ashmore, who focuses his work on new construction and remodeling projects in The Houston Heights, is fascinated by design. He said local builders don't pay enough attention to design in general, waiting for new design trends to filter from New York and California to Texas. He believes it is critical to stay at the forefront of design to have the greatest impact on potential home buyers.

Current design trends include using exotic woods from rain forests and Africa on elevations, exposing brick and finishing floors in concrete. He noted that a "steampunk aesthetic" with elements that could have been in a castle will help sell a house in Houston quickly.

A realtor in addition to being a builder for more than 20 years, Mike has learned that a property must check five boxes to sell. The first is curb appeal, the second is the front

door entry, the third is the kitchen, the fourth is the master suite, and the fifth is more nebulous, "where the savvy thrive and the lazy stave." Mike said it can be a great use of the outside space or an elongated, collapsing glass door, or a sexy pool or three-dimension interior walls. It can also be "hitting a home run at integrated design." Good design is a factor in checking all five of these boxes.

"A house is a two-dimensional space. But the third dimension, impacted by artistry and design, are those elements that make someone laugh and cry and get emotionally invested in a house."

But emotions can also become a factor in a new construction or remodeling project. Ashmore keeps the clients on track. "I'm fairly adept on my feet. I do really well with people by keeping everybody calm, cool and collected."

Ashmore especially enjoys speculative development because he can put his special touch on those projects. "I take pleasure in design; it's a way to separate myself from





the competition.” He typically creates the plans in CAD (computer-assisted design) software, then turns them over to Cecilia Gerber, an architect also based in The Heights. He makes all of the finish selections on these projects, but he works with Missy Stewart, an interior designer in The Heights, on other projects.

Aplomb Development completes 20-25 projects a year between speculative development, remodels and commercial work. About 80 percent of the work is on residential projects, which range from \$900,000 to \$1.3 million and 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. Aplomb works on a lot of tear-downs, but it also tackles historical renovations and other remodeling projects, which are always part of the demand among The Heights’ homeowners.

His clients are often young professionals between the ages of 35 and 50. He said he is just as likely to pick and choose his clients as they are to pick and choose their contractor. He wants his clients to share his artistic and design aesthetic so they will be satisfied with his work. “My clients come through referral from trusted sources in my network.”

Ashmore also spends about 20 percent of his time on

commercial projects, such as the recently completed 10,000-sq.-ft. strip center that contains a bicycle shop, two restaurants and a gym. That too is in The Heights.

Although he grew up in The Woodlands, Mike appreciates The Heights, an area he knows well because he also lives there with his wife. He especially enjoys the walkability of the compact neighborhood, running on the streets. Because he is out in the neighborhood daily, he said he doesn’t need to advertise. “I have enough work because of [Hurricane] Harvey. I can pick and choose my projects.”

But Ashmore did not set out to be a builder and realtor. While he was in college studying film, he planned to write and direct movies. However, a weekend rendezvous on a trip back home resulted in his becoming a father unexpectedly. He left college and worked in several jobs, including a stint at Enron. “That job was never what I was meant to do. I was doing the Devil’s work.”

Eventually Mike became a project manager with a production builder. Realizing that he wanted to become a builder himself, he knew he needed someone with greater expertise and took his trainer, Craig, with him when he started Aplomb Development. He chose the name Aplomb



because it means grace under pressure, an attitude he appreciates and always tries to adopt.

Ashmore anticipates a massive slowdown in the luxury home market within five to 10 years because interest rates are rising, building materials' costs are skyrocketing because of the recently imposed tariffs and inventory of unsold houses is stacking up to a 14-month supply. "I must be incredibly selective in price and location of future projects."

Mike learned several lessons during the 2008 economic



downturn. "I took my arrogance right into the collapse. The risk can be tremendous with speculative projects. I had \$13-14 million in debt. I was accepting any random project, what I call 'mailbox money' to keep afloat."

One of those projects was flipping a bed-and-breakfast in the Caribbean. He learned to diversify his assets, however, and plans to return to the Caribbean to sell boats and planes in five or six years. "I think retirement is highly underrated. I have enough passions to keep from getting bored."

However, it's hard to believe that Mike will immediately kick back and enjoy the slower pace of the Caribbean. He calls himself a "grinder," currently working from 7 in the morning to 8 or 9 at night, seven days a week. But he's reinvented himself before. The next version of Mike Ashmore may simply be a simpler life.

***To learn more about Aplomb Development Co., contact Mike Ashmore at [1234MikeAshmore@gmail.com](mailto:1234MikeAshmore@gmail.com) or call 713-997-9433.***

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