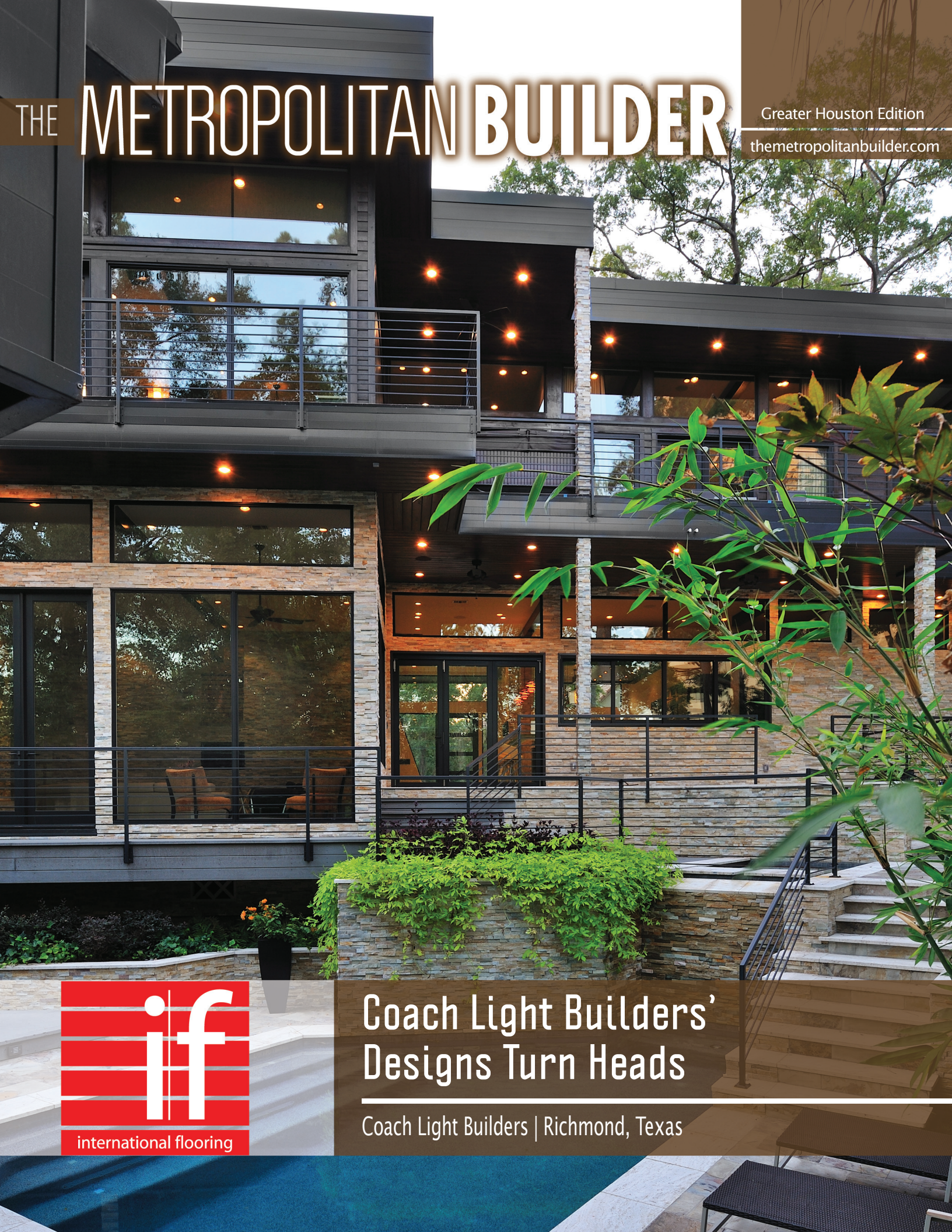


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Coach Light Builders' Designs Turn Heads

Coach Light Builders | Richmond, Texas



Coach Light Builders' Designs Turn Heads

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Mike Tisdale of Coach Light Builders is a guy with an eye for design. His designs will catch your eye and turn your head and even lead to magazine features and awards. In fact, his first custom home, a 10,000-sq. ft. ultra-modern home in Memorial won House of the Year.

"I just have a natural design aesthetic. I had no idea I liked this stuff. I can put colors together, do this, do that. I don't know why. I've never had art classes. That's what's so ridiculous. I have no idea. Zero. None [where this talent comes from]. But I can picture it [a design]; I can see what it's like before [construction]," he said. "Buyers looking for someone a little bit different are a good fit with me."

Tisdale said the major difference between other builders and him isn't his design ability but rather his love of building homes. "It's not a business for me. It's something I love. How much fun is it to talk to people and pick things out? I haven't set an alarm in 20 years."

This Houston native started building about 25 years ago

by focusing on townhouses inside The Loop. He built about 350 of them in partnership with real estate investors. Everything was going wonderfully, he said, until the 2008-2009 drop in the economy. Then Tisdale build that first spectacular house for one of his investors, and he found his niche in high-end custom houses. "When opportunity knocks, you open the door. I thought, 'Oh, wow! This is something.!' I've been so busy building large customs since then that I haven't looked back." He said he has built a lot of athletes' houses, including one for J.J. Watt.

"I have an eye for detail. I take a lot of pride in my work. I'll get it [the construction] done right the first time. We have such a good team. Our trades and everybody else we've used forever, like 15, 20 years."

Integrity is important to Mike. "I'm very careful with the construction and with the clients' money. No money commingles with other clients' money. If you misuse \$10, it's the same as misusing \$10,000 to me. I'm very, very careful.



“I’m going to be as honest and accurate in the beginning of budgeting as at the end. My budgets may be a little bit more than other builders, but that’s because I like to do all of the allowances. I can’t stand change orders. The cost of a high-end custom home is the same as anything else per square foot. It depends on the extras. Thirty percent of the cost of the house is what the client picks out.” Think marble floors, indoor pools, indoor LED waterfalls.

Relationships with his clients are also very important to this business owner; most of his clients become his friends. “These people are so nice. It’s a different type of client at the high-end [of building]. If I meet with someone and like them, I’m in,” whether the house is a half-million dollars or \$10 million. “It’s a two-year marriage to build a custom house because it takes about a year to design a house for most people.”

Tisdale relies so completely on referrals that he doesn’t even bother to print business cards for himself or his two project managers.

Although most of Coach Light’s building projects are in The Loop, the company will build anywhere. While its projects are “all over the board,” the company builds mostly in the 8,000- to 9,000-sq. ft. range. He has two or three houses in construction at any given time and more in the pipeline. “Any more than that and I can’t keep up,” he





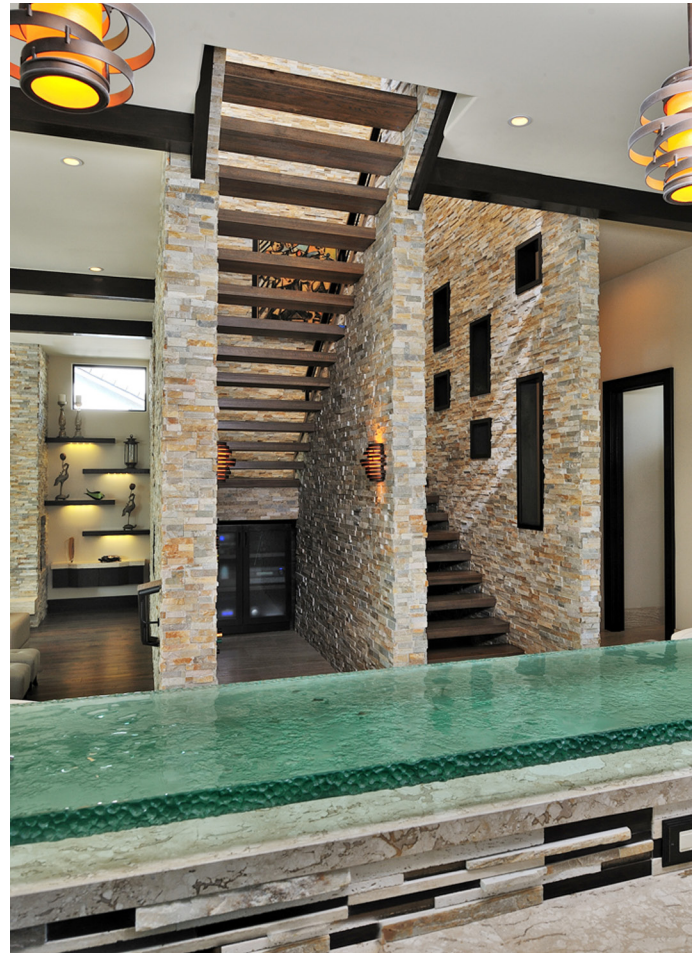
admitted.

The company also does some remodeling projects (about 10-20 percent of its business), “but they’re got to be substantial, about \$250,000 and higher. It takes more energy to remodel. They’ve got to be fun, creative and exciting.” While there’s about a year backlog for remodeling, most clients are willing to wait, Mike said.

Tisdale admits that he got into building by accident. A

high school drop-out who later got his GED, he worked a while for Home Depot and for a paint store, accumulating knowledge that he would use as a builder. He opened a flooring store with a showroom so unusual that the design firm next door brought its clients over to see it. “I learned I can sell stuff. People get a comfort level talking to me.”

But he decided to explore building after he helped to sell a custom house and make a \$100,000 commission in 30 days. “I saw the potential in building if done correctly. I took my



time, learning. I know how to run a business. If I weren't in building, I'd be owning some sort of business that would probably be related to something creative."

During his years in business, he's learned not to let any mistakes get in the way. Keep learning from your mistakes because you're never going to stop making them is his advice. "Once I screw up, I'm not doing it again."

Tisdale's future includes gradually turning the business majority ownership over to his new partner and building a small home of his own on a private lake. But it will be his wife Heather's project. A process engineer for BP, she's

very artistic, very creative and able to connect the dots, Mike stated. Besides, wives always make the decisions in building, he's learned.

To contact Coach Light Builders, call 281-466-1873, email mike@coachlightbuilders.com or visit www.coachlightbuilders.com.

The office is located at 9711 Mason Road, Richmond, TX 77407.

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