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Belmont Custom Homes'

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By Kathy Bowen Stolz



Understanding what homeowners want and helping them understand what will work on their lots is the hallmark of Bo Whiteford's building philosophy.

As owner and president of Belmont Custom Homes, Bo works closely with each homeowner, guiding the client through ordinances, setbacks and deed restrictions to determine what size of home can be built on the lots in the desirable neighborhoods of West University, Bellaire, Memorial, Afton Oaks and River Oaks.

This knowledge allows him to work in harmony with the homeowner and architect to develop the design while also incorporating the latest in-home technologies and energy efficiency.



He noted that the lot itself is a key consideration. Creativity in placing the house on the lot is often necessary, especially in inner-loop neighborhoods with smaller lots and when a swimming pool is part of the plan. Thirty or 40 percent of his clients request a pool and most have an outdoor kitchen, pergola and artificial grass lawns. "Curb appeal is a high priority, and in many cases, backyards have become an extension of the living area, so landscaping is key to making the clients happy."

From the first meeting and throughout the design process, he works with clients to determine their needs and desires for their new home. How many children do they have? What is the frequency of their guests, especially their parents? Where do they like to entertain within a house? Do they need an elevator now or in the future?



During the process he works with the clients, architects and designers to understand better the qualities the homeowner desires. This level of communication also helps to provide more accurate cost estimates as well as specifications and allowances to follow during the construction process, Bo stated.

Eighty percent of Belmont Custom Homes' work is in the West University neighborhood where Bo has built well over 100 homes in his 30-year career. With only 5,000 lots platted in West U, he is always looking for lots to buy where he can tear down the aging post-WWII houses and replace them with custom luxury homes that range in size from 3,500 to 5,000 sq. ft. and range in price from \$1.5 to \$3 million. Belmont constructs four or five custom homes each year as well as finishing two or three remodeling projects. Belmont does construct speculative homes, although 95 percent of those homes are sold before construction starts!

Looking back over his building career, Bo said that

Victorian-style houses in classic brick were the trend in the 1990s, followed by French Country and now Modern/Transitional styles. Five-piece crown molding is no longer preferred; houses today are more functional with clean lines.

“West U is where I got my start, where my father built before me. If lots are not available in West U, I will look in Bellaire or other areas, but I’m always building in West U. I have also built some houses outside of Houston, so that’s not to say I won’t go out to places like Round Top or Brenham and build someone a custom farmhouse.”

Bo takes pride in learning about soon-to-be-available West U lots from his previous clients or people who are neighbors to one of his building projects. “We work hard to keep neighbors happy by keeping our job sites clean and our trades [people] respecting work hours,” stated Jim Whiteford, project manager and Bo’s cousin. “People will call Bo to offer their lot.”



Bo added, “We’ve built numerous houses for people who’ve lived next door to one of our projects or on the same block. We spend more than some other builders to keep jobsites clean, and neighbors appreciate that effort. When you help someone, they will help you back.”

Customer service is paramount to Belmont Custom Homes’ business. “We strive to make the homeowners happy, to become friends. If they’re happy with the process, they’ll be happy when they move in.” Bo personally visits each job site several times a day and meets with homeowners on a regular basis. “People appreciate that we go back in a year and fix the bumps and bruises that occur without charging extra,” he added.

Quality is another factor in Belmont’s success. “We build a really good quality home because we want to. For example, we use BoraCare treatment, which prohibits bugs and mold, up to the top plate of the first floor, not just two feet up. We have used the same subcontractors for 20-25 years because they follow the level of quality that we and our clients expect.”

He continued, “The foundation is the most important factor in building a house in Houston because the soil is highly active, expanding and contracting constantly. We pour a six-inch slab, not four-inch, with 3,500 psi concrete instead of 3,000 psi.” He personally checks the columns/piers in each foundation.

Bo also attributes his company’s success to honesty and transparency. “Every house we build has its own bank account.”

He shared another business philosophy: “I’m a fourth generation Houstonian. I have always taken pride that my company treats our customers honestly and fairly. Right rather than wrong is clearly the path to follow and is what makes my company strong and will keep it strong in the future.”



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