

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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Allan Edwards
Custom Builder

Houston, Texas



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By Kathy Bowen Stolz | Photography Courtesy of Allan Edwards



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Celebrating his 40th year as a builder in 2014, Allan Edwards likes the words “longevity” and “perseverance” to describe his business.

“I’ve been in the homebuilding business a long time; it can be an up-and-down business. The thing I’ve learned the most is that you often encounter obstacles like a bad economy, or a challenging client. You can have down days, months, or even years, but you have to persevere. You have to be calm and never overreact. If there is a bump in the road, you can’t get discouraged because there will always be more and even better opportunities around the corner. The key to success in the homebuilding business is perseverance.”

Edwards, president of Allan Edwards Builder Inc., has been building new homes in Houston since 1974. The company completes five to seven high-quality custom homes annually with sizes ranging from 4,000 to 15,000 square feet, with values between \$1.5 and \$7 million. He builds two-thirds of the homes for a specific client, with the remainder started “on spec” and either sold when completed or customized to suit the buyer. Allan currently has homes under construction in Tanglewood, the Memorial Park area and Hunter’s Creek.

So that he may visit the job sites frequently, Allan focuses on those neighborhoods that are within 10 minutes of his office in the River Oaks Shopping Center. He takes pride in his close supervision of the building process.

“I’ve always been a very involved builder – I visit and walk my jobsites every day. It’s important for me to be on my jobs inspecting the work, communicating and meeting with our clients, designers, and, of course, our excellent tradespeople. My homes are like my children – I have to check on them regularly!”

Like a lot of builders, Allan is very busy these days. He said the current market is the strongest he has seen in decades. Although he has a steady stream of people requesting that he build their homes, he is careful not to take on too much work.

“I could always hire a bunch of superintendents and take on more houses to build, but that approach goes counter to my commitment to my clients and our unique business model. My clients are contracting with me because of my experience and my pledge to involve myself personally in the construction of their new home. It is a mistake for a builder to take on too much work and then not be able to provide the personal attention needed to build a true

custom home. In the end the product and the client both suffer.”

The company currently employs a “seasoned” project manager, R.S. “Dick” Davies, and an “up and coming” superintendent, Matt McGinley. Dick and Allan often walk job sites together, bringing 80 years of experience to each project. Autumn Gray is the office manager.

During his 40-year career Allan has built nearly 300 custom homes. “I feel a strong commitment to apply the decades of experience I have to our clients’ homes. I’ve learned what works, what to do, and, more importantly, what not to do. I have a strong eye for detail; the little things you do in a house make a huge difference. I know good architectural and interior design, and I know the very best designers and craftspeople in this city who can implement our vision.”

Allan’s homebuilding experience began as a teenager when he worked weekends and summers for a framing contractor in suburban Houston. At age 15, he and his buddies saw construction work as an opportunity to earn some spending money, and, as Allan noted, “a way to work on our tans.” Starting wage at that time was \$1.25 an hour, but Allan was able to earn enough money to buy his first car, a 1959 Chevy, for \$350. He continued working as a framer throughout high school and his two years of college. Although he intended to become an engineer, he discovered a love for homebuilding.

A strong work ethic and an equally strong desire to have his own business motivated Allan to start his homebuilding company at age 23 with \$5,000 in cash and a bank loan. The first two homes he built were specs, in addition to a custom home for a friend. During the first ten years in business, he built 10-20 custom homes each year.





“I remember working on the jobs during the day and making calls and doing paperwork in the evening. Computers and accounting systems did not exist for small businesses. I used a manual One-Write system, whereby you wrote a check, and it recorded it on a column using carbon paper. Very primitive compared to today.”



Communicating with subcontractors, vendors and clients was more difficult in the days before e-mail and cell phones. “You did your calling early in the morning to subs and in the evening to clients. No call waiting, no texting, and, of course, no e-mail. If they were on the phone, you got a busy signal and just had to wait,” he recalled.



In the mid 1980s, when Houston was a one-industry city, the local economy crashed when the price of oil dropped from \$33/barrel to \$10/barrel. The homebuilding and real estate markets spiraled down with a large number of foreclosures and bank and savings and loan failures, he noted. Allan was forced to take whatever project he could sell. He remembers driving to Lake Conroe daily to build a house for a client and even taking on remodeling jobs as a way to pay his bills.

But in the late 1980s the homebuilding market slowly recovered, and Allan’s custom building flourished again. However, that economic downturn made an indelible mark on Allan. He vowed to never get over-extended in the fickle business of homebuilding, promising himself to build only a handful of homes each year. His conservative business model allowed him to survive the 2008 economic downturn with enough pre-sold custom work to carry the company through it.

Over the years Allan Edwards Builders has constructed new homes in every major custom market, including Southampton, Bellaire, West University, River Oaks,

Memorial and Tanglewood. “I cut my teeth building 2,500-3,500 sq ft subdivision-type custom homes. I made a decision 30 years ago to move inside the Loop and focus on higher-end custom homes, building my business up to what it is today.”

Allan still gets excited about building, even after decades in the business. “I am always looking for better ways to manage my business and build better homes. You learn something new every day. It is this striving for constant improvement that keeps me going and motivated. It is very satisfying when I make an improvement – no matter how small the improvement is – in our systems and processes or in our homes.”

He noted that the best changes in construction during his career are the emphasis on energy efficiency and the improved technology available for homes. “I have a strong interest in technology, and I am constantly reading about and studying the latest in building science. I am a big proponent of energy efficiency.”

The project that Allan is most proud of is near and dear to his heart – the weekend home that he and his wife Janie built for themselves on their 50 acres in Chappell Hill. “I designed it myself and chose all of the interior materials. It fits so well in the beautiful countryside of Chappell Hill. We designed it for ourselves and our six dogs and

family and friends who visit.”

But he gains the most professional pride from “having happy clients who speak highly of my work and my ethics and the relationships I have formed with many homeowners and others in the industry.”

You may contact Allan Edwards Builder, Inc. at 1973 W. Gray #5, Houston, TX 77019 or at 713-529-4481 or at www.aedwards.com.

