

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition
themetropolitanbuilder.com



Sabo Custom Builders Owner Finds Satisfaction

Sabo Custom Builders | Houston, Texas



Photos by Kathleen O Ryan Fine Art Photography

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By Kathy Bowen Stolz



Satisfaction. It's an important word to Ed Sabo, owner of Sabo Custom Builders, which specializes in building luxury, one-of-a-kind custom homes in the Houston area.

Sabo works hard to keep his customers satisfied with his work as a custom homebuilder and remodeler because he relies on their recommendations to bring him new customers. He considers the clients to be partners in each project, making sure they play an interactive role through all phases of the homebuilding process, from design to construction to decorating. He even tries to make the process fun! "I really enjoy meeting new people. It's a very rewarding experience for me, too."

He said integrity and his personal attention set him apart from other builders. “If we say we’re going to do something, we do it.” He is personally involved with all aspects of the building process, making sure the projects stay on budget and on time by providing an easy-to-follow process. Typically Sabo Custom Builders handle three to seven projects at any given time. He credits his long-term relationships with his loyal subcontractors as a key to his success. “My trades may not be the cheapest, but they do the great work and provide the best value to our customers.

“I spend about 50 percent of my time out in the field and 50 percent in the office, dealing with sales elements, such as working with architectural designers, kitchen designers and spatial planners.” Clients may come in with a set of drawings, but those may have a lot of blanks in them, he said. “I see myself as a conductor of a symphony. There are a lot of moving parts that need to be coordinated in

homebuilding.” Sabo also employs a field superintendent.

Sabo said that best changes in the construction industry during his career have come from technology: cell phones apps, iPads, camera phones and special software for builders. “Some builders don’t embrace technology, but I find it decreases mistakes and lowers costs.”

Ed uses that technology to improve communication with the client. He takes daily photos of each project’s progress and uploads them to a web-based client management tool so the client can see the project in real time. He finds the photos to be a great way to document daily progress, changes and to ensure the clients are satisfied that their dream home is becoming reality.

Personal satisfaction is just as important to Ed himself, for seeing the smiles on his customers’ faces is one of the most rewarding aspects of his career as a builder, he said.



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Personally, he enjoys the finishing stages of a project after the drywall goes on. That’s when he and the clients get to see the project come to life. “It’s fun to see the two-dimensional, paper project become three dimensions. It looks totally different!”

Ed’s path to becoming a builder started behind a lawn mower, not behind a hammer. While in high school he


happened across Builder Magazine at the home of a friend whose dad was a builder. At the time Ed owned a successful mowing and landscaping business, and he began to cut the grass at new home sites. He decided that building homes would fulfill his passion for self-employment. As a first step Sabo earned a bachelor's degree in construction management at Texas A&M University. He explained that construction management is a blend of management, engineering and architecture courses. His professors urged him to start his career in commercial construction, working for others, because later it would be easier to transition out of commercial work than into it.

Following that advice, Sabo took a job working for Manhattan Construction Company, which was building the Harris County Criminal Justice Center in downtown Houston. During the dotcom boom, he joined "corporate America" after Motorola made him an offer he couldn't

Sabo returned to the building industry when he became the operations manager for a local luxury homebuilder in the Houston Heights area that built about 20 luxury homes a year. But the recession forced a downsizing of staff, Ed decided to pursue his original goal of becoming a self-employed homebuilder; he started Sabo Custom Builders in 2009. "I didn't have much choice. No one was hiring. Houston was like a ghost town.

"Those first years were rough, but my mom and dad inspired me to live my dream. They always told me to have faith that things would work out. I took any kind of work I could, surviving on small jobs, including punch work and make-ready.

"I thought I'd be an instant success, but it's been a really long road. For years I scraped by. But thanks to the help of others, I was able to build my business, mostly through referrals and word of mouth. I felt like the



"If we say we're going to do something, we do it."

Photo by Michael Stolte Photography

refuse.

He returned to Houston to work full-time on his MBA with a concentration in finance at Houston Baptist University. Again, "corporate America" called, and Ed worked for Compaq and HP in supply chain management for seven years.

phoenix rising from the ashes. Now I'm ready to reorient the majority of my time away from remodeling projects to new home construction."

Sabo said his revenue mix has been about 50 percent remodeling and 50 percent new construction. He expects the mix to change to 80 percent new construction in 2015 with plans to build six spec homes. And during the next



five years he plans to focus even more on building spec and custom homes.

He's excited about building two sets of three spec homes in the Houston Heights area; groundbreaking is just months away. The first group of single-family, detached homes – currently in the permitting stages – will combine modern Craftsman undertones with some Mediterranean elements. Each home will be in the \$600,000 to \$650,000 range and will be in the same neighborhood, where there is demand for this type of higher-end, higher-finish home. Sabo plans for the second set of three homes to be New Orleans style with stacked front porches. Sabo said the homes will not be pre-sold, although the buyers will be able to make some finishing touches.

Ed himself has owned a home in the Historic Heights since 2000 when he bought a 1920s bungalow as a project for him and his late father to work on together. Fortunately his dad was able to finish the home with Ed before being stricken with leukemia. Sabo moved in after seven years of weekend labor and has fond memories of the time he spent with his father; he will always cherish the time they spent together. He regrets that his father is not alive to enjoy the success that he helped foster and encourage.

Sabo belongs to the Greater Houston Builders Association (GHBA) and the Houston Custom Builders and Remodeler's Council. He stays informed with changes in construction with industry-specific continuing education and regularly attends GHBA meetings. Ed also adheres to the NAHB code of conduct and ethics. Although much of Ed's "free" time is spent doing paperwork in the evenings and weekends, he enjoys running and biking at Memorial Park or training for half marathons. He also enjoys tailgating at Aggie football home games, fishing in Galveston and snow skiing. In addition, Ed is an active volunteer and lifetime member of The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Yes, satisfaction is an important word to Ed Sabo. He obviously finds satisfaction in both his vocation and his avocations!

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