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Alleanza Custom Builders: Covenant and Commitment

Alleanza Custom Builders | Houston, Texas



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Giselle Bernard

Publisher

It's June already and that means higher temperatures and humidity – two factors that can stress the body's ability to cool itself.

Heat illness becomes a special concern of mine since I've experienced heat exhaustion before – a pretty scary situation, to say the least. I'm not much on drinking a lot of water and found out first hand that working or playing in the sun's heat without hydrating is a recipe for heat-related illnesses.

I try to write about heat stroke every year about this time to bring about awareness. There are three major forms of heat illnesses: heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, with heat stroke being a life-threatening condition. Take heed:

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps or muscle spasms are caused by heavy sweating and affect the arms, legs or stomach. Although heat cramps don't cause permanent damage, they can be quite painful. To prevent them, drink electrolyte solutions such as Gatorade during the day and eat more fruits like bananas.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a condition more serious than heat cramps. When you don't drink enough fluids to replace what you're sweating away, your internal air-conditioning system becomes horribly overworked. The symptoms include headache, heavy sweating, intense thirst, dizziness, fatigue, loss of coordination, nausea, impaired judgment, loss of appetite, hyperventilation, tingling in hands or feet, anxiety, cool moist skin, weak and rapid pulse (120-200) and low-to-normal blood pressure.

People suffering these symptoms should be moved to a cool location, such as a shaded area or air-conditioned building. Have them lie down with their feet slightly elevated. Loosen their clothing and apply cool, wet cloths or fan them. Have them drink water or electrolyte drinks. Have them checked by medical personnel. Victims of heat exhaustion should avoid strenuous activity for at least a day, and they should continue to drink water to replace lost body fluids.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke kills and happens when the body has been depleted of its water and salt. The body's temperature rises to deadly levels. Someone usually experiences heat cramps and/or heat exhaustion before experiencing symptoms of heat stroke, but not always. Heat stroke is sometimes mistaken for heart attack, especially in a work setting.

The early symptoms of heat stroke include a high body temperature (103° F), an absence of sweating, hot red or flushed dry skin, rapid pulse, difficulty breathing, constricted pupils and any/all of the signs or symptoms of heat exhaustion. In an advanced state of heat stroke, the victim may exhibit bizarre behavior and have high blood pressure, seizures or convulsions, collapse, loss of consciousness and a body temperature of over 108° F. It is vital to lower a heat stroke victim's body temperature. Seconds count. Pour water on him/her, fan the victim, or apply cold packs. Call 911 to get an ambulance on the way as soon as possible.

To prevent heat-related illnesses take the following health tips into consideration:

- Condition yourself for working in hot environments. Start slowly, then build up to more physical work. Allow your body to adjust over a few days.
- Drink lots of liquids. Electrolyte drinks are good for replacing both water and minerals lost through sweating. Never drink alcohol and avoid caffeinated beverages like coffee and pop.
- Take a break if you notice you're getting a headache or you start feeling overheated. Cool down for a few minutes before going back to work.
- Wear light-weight, light-colored clothing when working out in the sun.
- Take advantage of fans and air-conditioners.
- And, believe it or not, get enough sleep at night.

A little knowledge goes a long way in avoiding heat illnesses....

Giselle Bernard- Publisher



Alleanza Custom Builders: Covenant and Commitment

By Penny Jones | Photography by Mike Willcox




ALLEANZA
CUSTOM HOMES

Had Shawn Sidoti, founder of Alleanza Custom Builders, been able to accept the great job offer he received after college graduation, there might not have been an Alleanza Custom Homes. A native Houstonian and business-management major at Texas A & M University, Shawn accepted an offer from Enron and figured his future lay in the financial world. It was not to be, however, and as Enron very publicly unraveled, it pulled his offer. He quickly regrouped and called a home builder he knew that had a position open. From there, the story began to write itself as Shawn realized he'd found his calling.

Shawn started Alleanza Custom Homes in 2007. "Alleanza," Italian for "covenant," conveys a sincere

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Rain, Rain, Go Away! Legal Issues for Remodeling After a Storm

By Ian P. Faria & Jon Paul Hoelscher of

Coats | Rose | Yale | Ryman | Lee, a professional corporation

With the recent unprecedented rainy season experienced in the Houston area, it is timely to discuss laws related to construction projects on property after a storm. We all know there is potential for Houston and the Gulf Coast to experience tropical storms, tropical depressions and of course hurricanes. However, we have now experienced wide-spread flooding on at least three separate occasions over the last 18 months.

Whenever a storm hits the Houston area, there is potential for contractors and remodelers to be hired to perform the necessary remediation efforts. Any contractor hired to perform services on a natural disaster remediation project needs to be mindful of recent legislation that controls this type of work.

In 2011 the Texas Legislature enacted the Disaster Remediation Contracts Statute which will affect contractors who engage in remediation construction projects stemming from a natural disaster. The Law is included in Chapter 57 of the Texas Business & Commerce Code. The law applies to disaster remediation contractors, which are identified as those engaged in the removal, cleaning, sanitizing, demolition, reconstruction or other treatment of improvements to real property performed because of damage or destruction to that property caused by a natural disaster.

A natural disaster is defined as widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property related to any natural cause, including fire, flood, earthquake, wind, storm or wave action that results in a disaster declaration by the governor. This means that any construction remediation project related to a natural disaster will fall under this law.

The statute requires any agreement for disaster remediation work be reduced to a written contract. Contracts for a disaster remediation projects must contain a disclosure statement with specific language outlining the statute's prohibitions in boldfaced type of at least 10 point font. The requirements and legal effects of the statute cannot be waived by any party through contract or

other means. Additionally, any violation of the statute is also considered a violation of the Texas Deceptive Trade Secret Act, which allows for the recovery of attorneys' fees and multiplying damages in certain instances.

The law also provides that a contractor may not require a full or partial payment before the contractor begins work and may not require partial payments in an amount that exceeds an amount reasonably proportionate to the work performed, including any materials delivered. Therefore, a contractor cannot require a down payment, draw or other form of payment until work begins.

The law does not apply to remediation contractors if they maintain a physical business address in the county or a county adjacent to where the work is to be performed for one year prior to the date of contracting. This exception allows "local" companies to continue business as usual.



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However, the best practice would be to have your contracts and business practices set to comply with this law so that you can be ready to help in the event the next natural disaster is more than a county away.

If you are revising your construction contracts or looking to enter into a new contract, you should consult with a construction attorney to be sure each provision complies with Texas law.

Ian P. Faria is a director with Coats | Rose and is a member of the firm's construction/surety law and oil and gas/energy sections. Ian was selected as a Texas Super Lawyer in 2014 in construction law. This is an honor conferred upon only on 5 percent of the total lawyers in Texas. (Previously he was selected as a Texas Super Lawyer "Rising Star" in construction law in 2012 and 2013). He was also selected by his peers for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America©



2014 and 2015 in the field of construction law. In 2015, he received the highest rating, AV Preeminent®, by Martindale-Hubbell® Law Directory. This is Martindale-Hubbell's highest possible rating for both ethical standards and legal ability.

Jon Paul Hoelscher is a director with Coats | Rose and is a member of the firm's construction and litigation sections. He has been selected as a Texas Super Lawyer "Rising Star" for construction law by Texas Monthly since 2012, an honor conferred upon only 2.5 percent of the total lawyers in Texas. He also has served a council member for the Houston Bar Association's Construction Law Section since 2011.



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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

Carla Aston, ASID, RID

Morrison Showrooms know that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. They also know that an interior designer or interior design firm often become an intricate part of this process. Design professionals should be committed to creating individualized and functional designs to meet the lifestyles of their clients' families. Morrison works to inspire these ideas in its conveniently located showroom in the heart of Houston. Morrison offers many brands and designs, all exhibited in unique settings with interactive displays. Whether it's appliances, plumbing, hardware or lighting, they have brand to fit every budget and a style to fit every design. Contact Joann Ontiveros 713-861-2343 for more details.

This month Morrison speaks with Carla Aston, ASID, RID, owner of Aston Design Studio. After graduating with a degree in design, Carla spent nine years in the Dallas area employed by architectural and design firms working on all types of corporate, hospitality and high-end residential projects. After having children, she then followed her husband's work overseas and lived in Australia and Norway. Carla said she was so lucky to be able to travel and enjoyed observing different cultures, architecture and styles of living which broadened her perspective on design.

Since 2001, Carla has owned the studio of her dreams, Aston Design Studio in The Woodlands, where she designs all types of residential interiors. She loves to help clients create meaningful, beautiful, functional spaces to nurture their lives and loved ones.

Morrison: *What motivated you to go into the interior design field?*

Carla Aston: When I was in high school, I took home economics classes. We had a section on interior design and within that period there was a competition for home design, sponsored by local furniture stores. We created floor plans, sample boards, color schemes, etc. I ended up as one of the top finalists. As finalists, we had to arrange a vignette in one of the furniture stores, and then we were judged. I ended up winning first prize and got a small monetary award. I fell in love with design and the whole process involved. I went on to major in interior design in college.

Morrison: *How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?*

Carla Aston: It's always been competitive and it's not a



high-paying job. You either make it big or you struggle. It's just hard to validate your experience and expertise with something like interior design. Everyone sort of thinks they can do it. That part has never changed. What has changed has been the way designers do business, market themselves, and make money. The internet has impacted our whole business, enabling clients to have more access to products and information, which can be good and bad. It's great that clients have exposure to good design and information, but it can overwhelm and take them off in random, different directions many times.

Morrison: *How can an experienced interior designer help custom home builders or remodeling contractors with their building or remodeling projects?*

Carla Aston: I find many builders and remodelers have to spend a lot of time up front with clients, helping them with decisions, if a designer is not involved. This process really isn't a contractor's expertise, and it takes a lot of extra time that the contractor is not getting paid for. Designers are there to make the contractor's or builder's job easy, letting them focus on what they do best, building the project. We're the ones working directly with the client on design; we're the ones helping guide the

decisions to get the client to their overall design goals for their project. Then, we develop drawings, specifications, etc., that serve as the road map for the contractor so they can proceed full steam ahead with decisions made and a plan for the project.

Morrison: *What sets you apart from other designers?*

Carla Aston: I have a lot of experience in construction and tend to detail things to death. That really leaves no questions for the contractor or builder about what is to be done on the job. I worked for a large architectural firm at the beginning of my career, working side-by-side with gifted production and design architects, who produced amazing construction details. I understand how materials are put together, how cabinetry is built, what decisions need to be made on the job to get the project done. We produce complete sets of drawings with finish schedules, specifications and notes, so that there are few questions when it's time to build. We don't just stand on a job site and wave our hands around describing in words what we want or deliver pictures for the contractor to copy.

Morrison: *What has been your most challenging project and why?*

Carla Aston: The most challenging projects are where the homeowners really are unsure of what they want and have difficulty making decisions OR if the homeowner is too set on certain aspects of the design and doesn't want to hear new ideas. There's a happy balance in between that is a good fit for a designer/client relationship. Understanding what the clients' goals are and being able to communicate them, then being able to grant some artistic license to the designer to create a unique space just for them, is really the best relationship for both parties. It utilizes the designer's strengths and gets the most out of their talents for the client.

Morrison: *How do you begin the materials selection process when working with builders' and remodelers' clients?*

Carla Aston: I always begin by looking at floor plans. Laying out furniture, seeing where the vistas are through the home, identifying focal points and places where the most impact can be made with expenditures is somehow more apparent when viewed in the floor plan. Then I take to the elevations to bring that space up to become

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commitment to deliver on the promise of high-quality customer service, a concept Shawn learned from his two grandfathers, Buddy McGregor and Tony Salvaggio, as well as from his wife's family's restaurant businesses. "My grandfathers each owned and operated several businesses and I spent a lot of time with them when I was young, watching and learning how they handled customers, finances, and their workers," he explains. "As an adult, I've learned valuable management skills from my wife's family's operation of a number of successful restaurants."

Alleanza builds custom luxury homes ranging from

building one or two homes a year but now builds six per year. "From when we begin working with a client to handing them their keys takes us 12 to 14 months," Shawn says. "We also build one or two spec homes a year as a way to project our own creativity. Our primary designer is Allen Irvin of A. L. Design and we also use Brickmoon Design."

"I can't say enough good things about Shawn," says Irvin, a custom-home designer for 30 years. "We make an excellent team; he brings construction experience and youthful enthusiasm, and I bring design knowledge and old wisdom. He interprets my plans beautifully and stays true to what my design is trying to achieve."



"It makes me proud to know that the family that lives there trusted us to deliver exactly what we promised..."

\$900,000 to upward of \$2 million; square footages begin around 2,500 sf and range to more than 8,000 sf. The company has expanded its scope from Garden Oaks and Oak Forest to include West University, Meyerland, and the Heights, and Shawn anticipates continued growth. "In the next few years, we plan to strengthen our presence in the neighborhoods where we've been building and expand into additional areas such as Sugar Land and Richmond."

Approximately 75 percent of Alleanza's business is custom homes for high-end clients. The company began



Photography by Mike Wilcox - momedia.net



Photography by Mike Willcox - momedia.net

Alleanza employs a staff of four, including Shawn, and relies on a number of trusted independent subcontractors. “About 80 percent of our subs work with us on most of our jobs, and the other 20 percent rotate,” Shawn says. “We choose our subs according to the requirements of the project and always have the best ones for that particular job. Shawn is responsible for managing the different personalities brought together on a project. “Building one house enlists the skills and services of about 75 to 100 people, all with different attitudes and even different working hours. It’s a challenge to maintain standards while meeting each individual on their own level and using them to their maximum potential.”

A cherished activity for Shawn is revisiting a project months or even years after its completion. “I gain a whole new perspective when I am finished dealing with all the daily details,” he says. “It makes me proud to know that the family that lives there trusted us to deliver exactly what we promised.”

One of Shawn’s most memorable projects was a recently-completed residence that he calls a “one-of-a-kind” home. “We signed the contract with the owners in 2014 and it took us nearly two years to complete it,” he explains. “It was a highly-individual home and was truly

being built for them to live in for the rest of their lives. They wanted a home that would accommodate their adult children’s growing families when they visited. We built a separate guest house to ensure ample room for everyone and created a kids’ area in the pool. They also thought about getting older and asked us to install many ADA-influenced features. They were exceptional clients who wanted their home to be as perfect as they could make it – regardless of cost.”

In the years that Alleanza has been building custom homes, the industry has experienced a number of significant changes, one of which has been the increased costs of building materials and labor. “The cost for materials and labor has nearly doubled since I’ve been in business,” Shawn says. “A \$640,000 house in 2007 is about double that cost now.” He sees a more positive change in the way the internet has affected the market. “Websites such as Houzz and Pinterest have given home owners so many good visuals. Clients come to us now with much better ideas of what they want and they show us the pictures they’ve found on these websites. It has made communication so much easier and, interestingly, has also elevated clients’ tastes and expectations. Everything they see on line is the best and that’s what they want for their personal home.”

Alleanza's business stems primarily from word-of-mouth referrals from loyal former and current clients, according to Shawn. "We create a strong community presence in the neighborhoods where we build. Many of our clients have young families and we sponsor a number of children's sports activities such as softball and tee-ball. We do have a website and we're on social media as well but again, word-of-mouth is number-one for us."

"We're in a good place," Shawn concludes. "We are fortunate to appeal to clients who want quality without spending a fortune as well as clients who aren't concerned about cost. We've worked hard to build a good reputation, and I think that sells us better than any advertising we could do. We have definitely found the right niche."

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You may contact Alleanza Custom Homes at 713-898-7647 or info@alleanzacustomhomes.com



Photography by Mike Willcox - momedia.net



Natalie Blake Studios

Carves Works of Art in Tile

Natalie Blake Studios (NBS) works with designers and homeowners to customize porcelain ceramic tile as “fine art” to create a unique character for each home, reflecting its owners’ tastes. The tiles are both functional and decorative, whether they’re narrative or abstract.

The NBS staff rolls each ceramic tile from a wedge of clay, hand cut to any size, and lays it over pre-made forms to create sculptural effects. The staff hand carves each design, taking inspiration from natural, historical and architectural themes.

Members of the seven-member staff can carve any design and has created unique murals around the country. Recent projects include a total kitchen surround of tropical plants, sun and waves for a residence in Hawaii, as well as a huge narrative mural for an exterior wall of a hospital in Wisconsin.

“We are a fluid, adaptable and creative artisan studio that thrives on detail, challenge and creating the ‘heart of a home’ through our carving tool,” Natalie Blake said. The studio, located in Brattleboro, Vt., does not use molds.

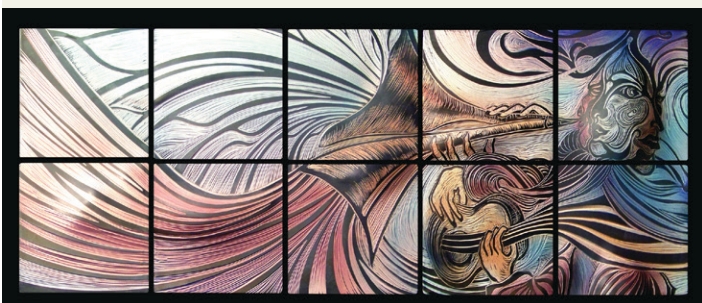
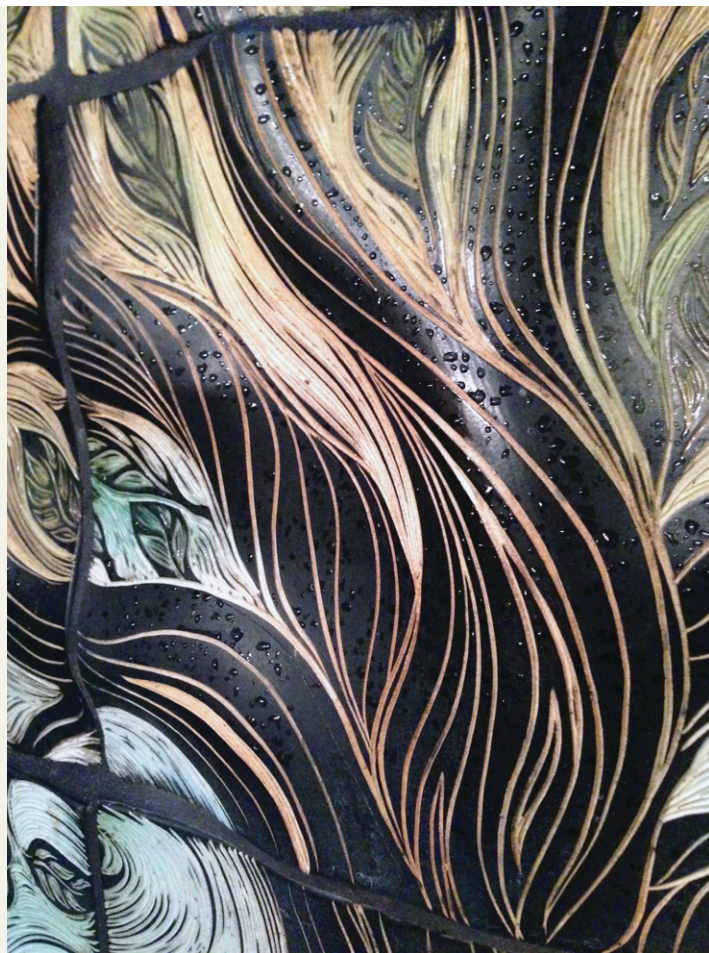
NBS tiles are known for their unique sculptural qualities and various undulations that emphasize the carving, she



added. Each tile has “mountain and valley” curves to give the image a 3-dimensional look and feel. The tiles are very tactile and richly colored, accentuating the imagery. Every project is a unique work of art, stated Blake.

The tiles are individually glazed and fired to 2140° F for a fully vitrified, scrub-able, waterproof tile, perfect for backsplash application or wall art. The tiles’ glass-like surface can be exposed to heat and water. The glaze colors will not fade or change color over time or by direct exposure to sunlight, according to Blake.

Visit Natalie Blake Studios at www.natalieblakestudios.com/tiles/backsplash-ideas/.



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a volume to comprehend. At that point, you can decide, based on the architecture, the volume, the visuals from various vantage points where it would be good to create impact. You can then see where to have pattern, where it would be appropriate to create detail, where an expensive material might be best enjoyed or noticed, etc.

I just worked on a kitchen remodel where we are doing some cabinet modification, but basically keeping what they have. We're doing new paint on the cabinets, new countertops, backsplash, lighting. When I elevated the main wall of the kitchen, the focal point, I realized that one odd cabinet at the end (an upper cabinet with a microwave) was hanging there, disrupting the symmetry of the rest of the wall. There was a central hood with adjacent cabinetry and then symmetrical windows on each side. It became apparent that the end cabinet could be easily removed and a microwave drawer installed in a lower cabinet, then freeing up that space for a more impactful design.

At that point, I knew I wanted to tile that whole wall around the cabinetry and windows, and a herringbone pattern would perfectly accentuate the height of the ceilings and bring a subtle tone-on-tone undulation to that wall. Then, I looked for the appropriate tile to use in that pattern. It's being constructed now and will be an amazing transformation.

That's typically my process; however, I can be inspired by a material or client preferences as well.

Morrison: Speaking about staying current, how to you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today

Carla Aston: I attend industry shows like KBIS every year and frequent all of our local showrooms often. I am really plugged into what's going on in design nationally, with lots of social media industry contacts. I write a design blog and am connected with other design bloggers and industry leaders, vendors, and designers.

Morrison: What would be your recommendation for "what to do first" in a decorating project when working with the builders and/or homeowners?

Carla Aston: I think homeowners need to decide what their end goals are and step back and really look at the value of their property and their long-term plans. One



thing to consider is how long they anticipate being in their home. If they plan to be there five to seven years, then the approach to that job is more for the here and now. Remodeling for someone who is going to stay for 20 years really should be addressed more with eye on the future. Budgets are also limiting factors and must be considered from the start. I really like making the design of the home fairly cohesive and where the quality level is dispersed throughout the home in appropriate levels. Then they should start looking at style, creating idea books and collecting images of what they like, keeping in mind budget constraints and allowances.

You may contact Carla Aston Design Studio at 26202 Oak Ridge Drive, Ste. A101, The Woodlands, TX 77380 or at 281-364-6633. You may read her blog at <http://carlaaston.com/designed>.



CARLA ASTON, ASID, RID
Owner of Aston Design Studio



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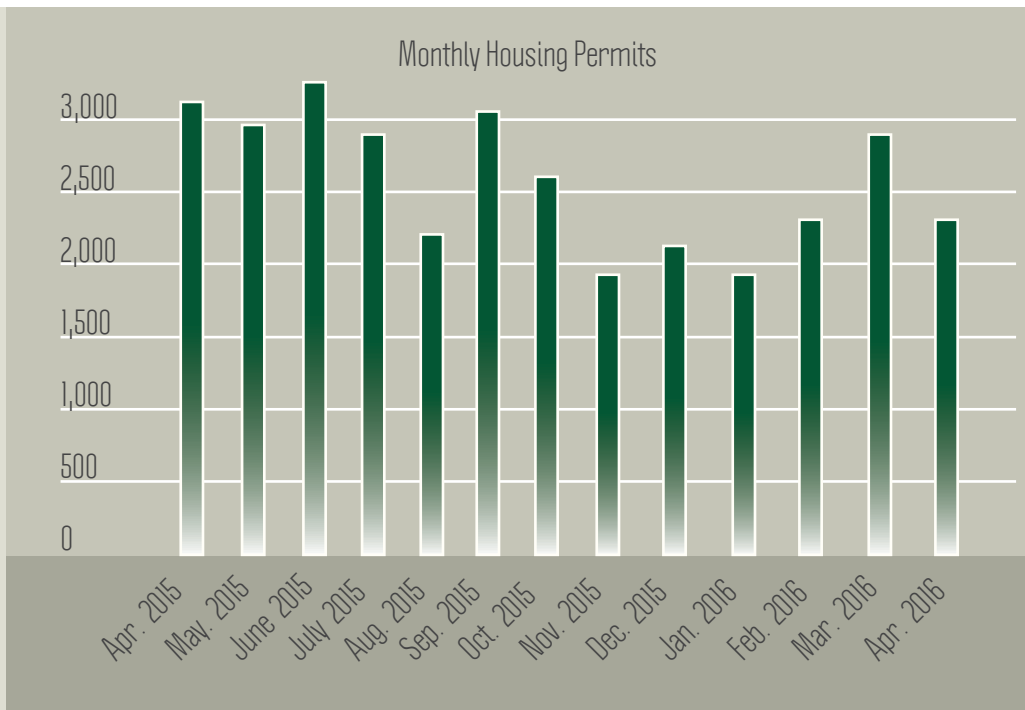


Houston Housing Picture

Bohlke Consulting Group, LLC

Monthly housing permits filed by builders in the Houston Area.

Apr 2015	3,256
May 2015	2,885
June 2015	3,187
July 2015	2,679
Aug 2015	2,351
Sep 2015	3,151
Oct 2015	2,260
Nov 2015	1,862
Dec 2015	2,103
Jan 2016	1,921
Feb 2016	2,385
Mar 2016	2,816
Apr 2016	2,355
Apr. 15 v. Apr 16	-27.7%



MARKET	May 14-Apr 15	May 15 - Apr 16	ANNUAL % CHANGE	-	-
Grand Total	34,711	29,955	-13.7%	-	-
Central	6,333	5,065	-20.0%	-	-
Far North	4,173	3,688	-11.6%	-	-
Northeast	3,570	2,797	-21.7%	-	-
Northwest	4,577	3,699	-19.2%	-	-
South	2,264	2,178	-3.8%	-	-
Southeast	1,417	1,403	-1.0%	-	-
Southwest	4,194	3,865	-7.8%	-	-
West Northwest	3,647	3,388	-7.1%	-	-
West Southwest	4,527	3,866	-14.6%	-	-
Not ID	9	6		-	-

Permit activity shows a 27.7% decrease between April 2015 and April 2016. Annual permit numbers continue the trend reporting a 13.7% decrease for the Houston market area. All market areas have negative growth over the last twelve months.

GHBA Mid-Year Forecast Luncheon Summary with Dr. Mark Dotzour

- Houston is a unique American Economy.
- Dr. Dotzour sees Houston going another 2 or 3 years of a growing Economy.
- In our Capitalistic cycle there are ups and downs. Next downturn he predicts which be much less severe than the Great Recession.
- Htown's housing market is very resilient.
- National monthly job growth has been at a very steady 2% growth rate for last several years. 150 K to 200 K jobs are created every month.
- Some good news recently, 1st time since 2007 that we had real wage growth (2 ½ %) in the middle class.
- In Houston, outlook for moderate priced homes is very robust.
- Nationally and locally our consumer confidence remains high.
- Consumer spending has been flat for 5 months, we should see an increase in consumer spending with these wage increases.
- Corporate profits have been flat since 2011. That results in flat growth on jobs.
- Energy and Agriculture are both down at this time.
- Consumer spending has been driving this Economy. (Think new cars)
- Construction of Single Family homes has yet to rev up, but it's coming.
- USA Single Family Housing Market will be a Bull Market for a decade. Housing stock is low at the moment due to no construction during the Great

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Recession.

- Extended economic recovery in Htown will be all about Single Family homes. We are over built on Multi Family homes. When current Multi Family projects are done, few new Multi Family projects will start.

- Nationally we are at the infant stages of a Single Family Housing Boom. It will be a Bull Market.

- Then if Energy returns (Oil has been hovering close the \$ 50 per barrel) Htown will be very busy again!

- Business Cycle Index for Houston is up.

- 2016 will be the most pain local (Htown) Bldrs will feel. Market should just get better from here.

- % rates will rise and but this will not destroy the Housing Markets. It will be slight. Moves with the rate of Inflation. Inflation has been flat for a long time now.

- Mortgage % rates will stay plenty low enough to spur demand.

- The USA is winning the Energy wars that the Middle East started. Our ingenuity and advances in extraction of Petro products has gone off the chart. \$ 60 a barrel might be the new \$ 100 per barrel due to our technological advances.

- We have an education advantage as well. Our PHD's and MBA's are coming out of grad school with technology that is changing the Energy business.

- Feds are actively working to increase home ownership. 5% down is the new 20% down.

- Dr. Dotzour predicts likely 10% down from 2015 on Housing Starts.

- Good news is Htown is not over built. Watch your debt and keep Building.



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