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Building Dreams

Professional architects, builders and interior designers are turning Oklahoma's houses into homes.

By Amanda O'Toole

Photography by Scott Johnson, Hawks Photography

Tulsa-based architect Brian Freese likens designing a home to creating a sculpture out of clay. Each home is as unique as the person he creates them for with different nuances, layouts and connections to the nature that surrounds the projects.

The trick, he says, is to find the spirit hidden within the plot of land where his clients are building or remodeling and merge the way they live with needs, desires and personalities to create a perfectly personalized home.

From doorknobs to paint colors and the natural flow of a house, five Oklahoma professionals dish about the details it takes to turn homes into more than just a place to live.

Architect Brian Freese says the most important component of a living area is a sculpture or piece of art that is meaningful to the homeowner.



Many master bedrooms incorporate fireplaces as well as sitting areas.

"The fact of the matter is we all live differently, act differently. We're all unique people," Freese says. "If anybody has the ability to take a house they purchased and personalize it in the way they live, it will highly affect their quality of life and become a source of inspiration in their lives."

Ideas for rooms, décor and other details are taken from magazines, pictures and movies as well as other muses, says Jack Arnold, an architect and principal owner of Tulsa-based Jack Arnold Companies.

"I get excited about it. We go to the movie and while people are watching the movie, I'm watching the set," he says, rattling off lists of films he's been sent to see, including *Something's Gotta Give* starring Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson and *The Holiday* with Jude Law and Cameron Diaz.

"They may be kissing on the film, but I'm looking at the bookcase."

A successfully built customized home is a compilation of work between the homeowners, architects, builders and interior designers. Emphasis is placed on major rooms: kitchens, baths, master bedrooms, outdoor living spaces, entertainment areas and living rooms.

The Kitchen

Kitchens are the gathering points for families and friends, increasing the emphasis clients are placing on them, says Stephen Edwards, a certified interior designer and owner of Stephen G. Edwards Interior Design.

"A house I'm currently working on will have a big bar that wraps around with seats for 14 people. They want to have all their friends sit there and watch them when they cook," he says. "They also have different people who are great chefs who will come into their home and cook."

"The idea of watching people cook has become more fashionable," he continues. "Instead of it being a mystery of how the food is done, people want to watch it be prepared."

Edwards likes to keep clean lines and infuse older styles with newer ideas, making one-of-a-kind pieces in homes.

Countertops are a perfect way to personalize space, Edwards says, especially with materials like limestone and granite.

"Countertops can set the tone for the rest of the kitchen. For one client, we sandblasted all of the granite because she didn't want it to be shiny," Edwards says. "Granite is one of those

items you purchase to personalize your home. God never makes the same piece twice."

Builder Kurt Barron with Barron and McClary General Contractors of Tulsa sees a lot of cutting-edge materials inside the custom homes he helps create.

People are using glass tile, limestone floors and putting unique fronts on appliances in their kitchens, Barron says.

"We're seeing more of a modern design. Countertops are having sleek, square corners. It's more of a clean and crisp look," he says.

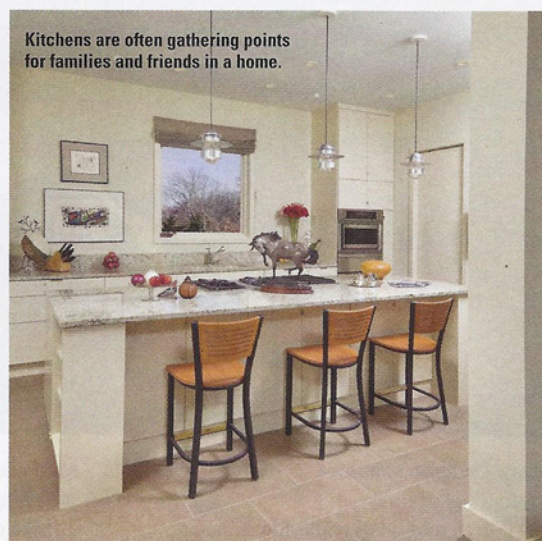
Families are also opting to build sitting areas or office spaces off of the kitchen, Arnold says.

"Families want a little area off the kitchen because that's where family gathers most often," he says, noting that parents often put computers in those areas so they can monitor their child's Internet usage. "Parents don't want kids to get isolated in another room."

The Bathroom

The amount of time spent in the bathroom influences how Freese builds them, including furnishings, lighting and amenities.

And while some may have specific plans for what they'd like to include in their bathrooms,



others only have general ideas.

"With master baths, usually I get the regular information like two sinks, a linen closet, a big closet, a tub. But when the conversation gets beyond equipment, we talk about how much time they spend in the bathroom and whether a tub is an important part of bathroom," Freese says. "It will evolve into a discussion about a feel and look and level of importance in their lives.

"I have to interpret what I'm hearing from my clients," he says. "I get general information, and I have to paint my own picture of what I think that means. I always try to give them more than what they expect, but it's based upon what they told me."

Clients are also turning master bathrooms into personal spas, Arnold says, recalling one project that included a private massage suite and French doors off of his-and-hers closet spaces.

"People like to incorporate things they've experienced," he says. "They have things from where they traveled in past. It might be a nice hotel or resort, and they want to put some of those influences they experienced within their house.

"It could be, for instance, someone went

to Mexico and they had an outdoor shower in their suite and they wanted to integrate that into their home."

Powder rooms are also ways people can make their homes unique, Edwards says.

"Powder bathrooms are important to most clients because it's usually a strong statement about the style of the house and being able to convey an aura of intimacy while giving it some life and excitement."

He typically recommends pairing a special piece, whether it's a sink or an antique, with hardware that has a similar feel.

"The items that go into that room, things that make it a special room, make it more exciting, more fun," he says. "The lighting, generally speaking, is quite a softer light. It's not a room to put on makeup, for example, so it's (to create) nuance.

"It's a quiet, peaceful and beautiful place."

The Master Bedroom

Homeowners are putting their own twists on furniture found in local stores to make their bedrooms unique, Edwards says.

One of his clients, for example, added hidden bookcases to a bed set to in order to keep

nightstands free of clutter.

"We may find a piece that is on a showroom floor, for example, that has a certain look for what we like," he says. "But how we customize it, we may change the finish or the hardware. It's more personal for them because it's customized."

Personal style can also be infused through bedding and other textiles in the room, he says.

"We do a lot of custom bed coverings and coverlets. Two or three clients have reversible bedspreads so they can change the feel of the room by the season or if they just want something different," Edwards says. "They can personalize spaces based on how they're feeling."

Comfort in the master suite is important, and how elements are arranged gives each custom home its own fingerprint. Lots of houses are incorporating fireplaces into the master bedrooms, as well as sitting areas and awe-inspiring views.

The same client of Arnold's who incorporated the spa-like master bathroom also had a sunroom off the master suite. Arnold says the couple wanted a comfortable spot to read where they could also control the harsh light coming inside the room.

Others are using electronic devices to control lighting, blinds and other elements to make the rooms cozy, private and perfect for sleeping.

"Rooms become secure, quiet and dark until you're ready for them not to be," Edwards says.

Outdoor Living

Outdoor living spaces have become just as important as rooms in homes. Homeowners are installing outdoor kitchens, entertainment areas with televisions and incorporating views as the artwork that adorns their homes.

Barron and his company have installed screened outside enclosures and motorized blinds that keep bugs and other unwanted pests from dropping in.

He's even seen clear Plexiglas roofs over outdoor areas so homeowners can have shelter and still enjoy being outdoors.

"It's a more functional screened-in porch," Barron says.

Blending a home's natural surroundings with its interior is another way to create one-of-a-kind touches.

Freese says many of his designs include homes with back walls comprised mostly of glass.

"I always ask what quality a property has and how unique is it to a home. Is there a vista or a thicket of trees 100 feet beyond, or is it just an internalized property where the best piece about it the piece of sky?" he asks. "The mission is to find what each piece of property has to offer.

"The key in creating a significant outdoor

Interior designer Charles Faudree encourages his clients to add personal touches to their living areas, which he describes as the hub of the home.



space is in figuring out what the property or land has. If it doesn't have much to offer, it's a matter of looking at the landscape that exists and seeing what it could be," he says. "You can create some sort of courtyard that offers privacy and great sun angles and the opportunity to most importantly blend that with part of the house."

Entertainment Area

Media rooms and areas designated for entertainment are becoming a staple in American living.

People designing their own homes are opting in include rooms to watch games, movies and host guests.

"I, for some reason, thought they might pass on and become not as important as they've become," says Arnold, who has installed drop down movie screens in libraries and above garages.

"People who've ordered them are people who have experienced them in other places," he says. "I've designed big, large media rooms and small, intimate areas. Large media rooms have big screens and acoustical work. They can be really extravagant with the right screens, light and equipment."

Families are also installing game stations, he says, to encourage their kids and their friends to stay close to home.

Homeowners have also included basketball courts and golf simulators in their entertainment

areas. Doing so requires a lot of room, Arnold says.

"If designing a house, it's human nature to say, 'I want this and this' in this house. It's so hard to have discipline not to do all these things," he says. "It is a dedicated space. You're using a pretty good area for that, and there are some functions that have to go with it."

"If you have a media room, do you have a fridge nearby, counter space and kitchenette? And do you have a bathroom nearby?"

One of the most extreme entertainment areas he designed was a converted garage space. The area had storage space for hunting, golf and other sporting goods equipment, a shower as well as a television, a bar and a fireplace so the homeowner could entertain guests.

Living Areas

Living rooms are also used heavily for entertainment and serve as the hub of a home, says Charles Faudree, owner of Charles Faudree Antiques and Interiors in Tulsa.

"It's around the TV or around the fireplace. It's what the conversation revolves around," he says.

Homeowners are putting personal touches in rooms by creating facades for the televisions in forms of bookshelves, armoires and artwork.

"They have these rollout paintings now that are made to go over flatscreens. It's automatic. You push a button and the screen rolls up," he

says, adding that people can also cover the TV with hinged artwork that can be lifted away.

Like other rooms in a home, details come in the form of furniture and wall décor.

"Sectional sofas are as big as they've ever been as well," Faudree says. "Pillows are great accessories. And most of my clients want custom furniture, and we select the fabric and create their own."

A home's biggest finishing touch is the artwork displayed on its walls, Freese says.

"It's a painting and sculpture the clients own or that the clients buy that add dimension and color and spirit to a place," he says. "I think a lot of people are moved by art internally. We don't always know how or why. Just the fact that a lot of us love art, that's all that matters."

"Even if it's a small watercolor, that can mean a lot to a person, or a couple or a family," he says, noting that many families pick out specific artwork that means something to them personally.

Every decision a homeowner makes, from paint colors to cabinets and window treatments, helps to make their house their own.

No matter the professionals' opinions, they say the home's outcome is ultimately up to the people who will live there.

"It's a process that goes on overtime," Arnold says. "It's always their house, it's not my house." ■