

Living Your Dreams In A Custom Built Home

By Hilary S Wolfson, Contributing Journalist

Armonk, NY – Building your dream home has all of the elements of a track meet: you have a slow start, long jumps and high hurdles to leap over before you get to the finish line. For those who have done that, the glory is all the sweeter when they see their blueprint dreams come to three-dimensional life...

Most experts agree that the foundation to making home building work for you is finding the “right person” to transform your plans and dreams into a reality. That person is the architect. Whether your tastes run along traditional lines or along the waves of contemporary design, finding the right architect can make (or break) your home building experience.

Inspiration plays a vital role in the “architectural process”, where the architect’s imagination, creative and interpretative talents combined with his / her engineering skills produces a functional, harmonious, beautiful home. How do you begin the building process and how can an architect help turn this potentially overwhelming journey into a smooth sailing experience?

Armonk-based architect Richard Kotz believes that taking this voyage is well worth the trip. As one of today’s leading forces in the architectural world (Mr. Kotz served as a designer for the 285-unit Trump Palace condo tower in Manhattan), this “design giant” of both rural and metropolitan architecture is well acquainted with the small details, the “nuts and bolts”, of the architectural process.

Given in fact that you have indeed found the “right” architect for you and your special home, then the next step is to have the architect “meet” you property or site and get to know it up close and personal. “An architect must look at such things as the driveway, views, settings, terrain – everything”, said Mr. Kotz. “Getting to know the building lot is essential if the architect is to help the customer envision a raw parcel of land as their beautiful custom home”.

Many people interested in building a home have already seen something in their travels that matches their tastes in terms of architectural style, size, etc. One Armonk (NY) resident Jeff Schlosser, for example, wanted his family’s northern Westchester County dream home to look like a home he had seen on the eastern tip of Long Island. “I even took pictures of this home, because I knew that it was very similar to what we were looking for”.

Inspired by the photographs that Mr. Schlosser showed him, Mr. Kotz created “his own personal vision”, never losing sight of his customer’s needs and wishes. “A good architect learns about the family’s life style”, says Mr. Schlosser. “He created a home that suits that lifestyle. We came in with a wish list prior to building and I’d have to say that 99 percent of this list was fulfilled”.

Mr. Schlosser believes that finding an architect who is a “good listener and a keen observer” can enhance that building process tremendously. Today Mr. Schlosser can look at his 7,000 square-foot Country French Colonial with a magnificent wraparound porch and see that his architect was indeed listening. “It’s everything we wanted, and more”, says Mr. Schlosser.

When Mr. Kotz receives a wish list from his clients, he gets a clear sense of what amenities the home owner is interested in. “For example”, says Mr. Kotz, “things like a computer station or playroom may be ideal for a family, whereas others may prefer an isolated master bedroom

retreat. Then of course there are the little extra touches, such as window seats in the hallway or bathrooms-it is these little extra amenities that add up to so much more”, emphasizes Mr. Kotz.

If anyone understands the building process, it’s the builder himself. They, too, recognize the importance of working with an architect to whom they can easily communicate-a critical step in the home building process. Take for example, Westchester County-based contractor Tom McKenna and Miami-based real estate developer Ed Henkin, both clients of Richard Kotz, Architect.

“My wife and I kept looking for someone we could really click with”, said Mr. McKenna, whose home is being built in Briarcliff Manor (NY). When they met with Mr. Kotz, they both agreed that he was “open, honest and receptive to ideas and suggestions” and that he was someone they could effectively work with. To date communication between client and architect could not be better. Although, Mr. McKenna admits that it doesn’t hurt being in the business himself. “I find that Richard and I speak a similar language”, said Mr. McKenna, “that helps a lot”.

Real estate developer / builder Ed Henkin had worked with Mr. Kotz on several different occasions and was therefore familiar with Mr. Kotz’s unique, family friendly homes-a blend of quality, traditional style with modern-day, state-of-the-art amenities. That was why when it was time to build his 7,000 square-foot formal (traditional) colonial in Bedford, NY, Mr. Henkin knew that Mr. Kotz was the best man for the job.

Richard can capture a traditional home and make it work in today’s world, and for today’s families, better than anyone I know”, says Mr. Henkin. A good architect, says Mr. Henkin, should get a distinct “feel for the people who live inside the homes that are being designed”, because then the home will adequately reflect the personality and tastes of the individuals and / or families it’s being designed for.

Other helpful tips to remember as you walk down the “home building road”, a road that may have twisting turns and bumps along the way, is to be patient. Homes aren’t built in a day. Trust the vision of a talented architect and builder. They are the ones who can create the feel and presence that you’re looking for in a home that’s specially design for YOU. Last but not least, be willing to compromise-at least a little bit. There are always constraints of some sort. Be realistic, and know that every, single thing won’t be perfect. But it can be awfully close...