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Foothills

custom homes

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FOR BUILDING THE HOME
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PLANNING YOUR CUSTOM HOME

BY ANNE WEST

YOU MAY HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT BUILDING A HOME ALL YOUR LIFE, BUT IT SHOULDN'T TAKE YOU A LIFETIME TO BRING THAT DREAM TO FRUITION. HERE, WE'LL WALK YOU THROUGH THE TIMELINE, SET YOU ON THE PATH TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT ARCHITECT AND BUILDER, PROVIDE TIPS ON HOW TO WORK TOGETHER AND EVEN MAKE SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCING YOUR PROJECT. AND, SINCE A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS, PHOTOGRAPHS OF A SPECTACULAR CUSTOM HOME ADORN THESE PAGES.

A sports car whips around a curved road, inches from a rocky cliff. An athletic man dives from an airplane holding a can of Mountain Dew. The words, "Professional stunt person—do not attempt this at home," scroll along the bottom of the screen. This warning not only applies to over-the-top television commercials, it seems to apply to building a custom home, too.

We have interviewed numerous builders, architects, designers and homeowners to better understand what you need to know before you plan your dream home. What have we learned? You

don't have to go it alone. Assemble a trusted team of professionals to guide you through the ins and outs, and your vision can become a spectacular reality. Here, we outline the process for you and provide resources you can turn to when diving into your latest stunt—building a custom home.

IS A CUSTOM HOME RIGHT FOR YOU?

A true custom home is original and designed for a specific site. "It's a one-of-a-kind home, never to be built again," says Ken Madden of Shiloh Custom Homes. "It's never a spin-off."

That said, it's important to know you may not need a custom home. Maybe you want to take a certain floor plan and modify it to suit your needs. The "semi-custom" results could be just what you want. Or, maybe you'd enjoy remodeling an older home.

So, what are the reasons for and against starting from scratch? If you want something with spaces designed specifically for you and your family's needs, custom is the only way to go, according to Jon Bernhard of Swaback Partners, because you can get everything exactly how you want it. By the time Bernhard finishes designing a

ARCHITECT: H&S International

BUILDER: Linthicum Custom Builders

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Paula Berg Design Associates

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 10,124 (15,213 including patio, garage, storage and mechanical)







HOME AS ART *To make their contemporary custom home a work of art, the homeowners knew hiring the right team was vital. Linthicum Custom Builders brought Bing Hu's design to fruition, while interior designer Paula Berg collaborated with the homeowners to make the art, architecture and furnishings the home's voice.*



IF YOU WANT SOMETHING WITH SPACES DESIGNED FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY'S NEEDS, CUSTOM IS THE ONLY WAY TO GO

POSITIVE PLANNING *The homeowners purchased two lots, and the architect took into account existing views, the rugged, hillside landscape and the homeowners' lifestyles when sketching the design.*

home, he knows his client's lifestyle—right down to the side of the bed he gets up on—and the spaces have been designed with those intimate details in mind. If you buy an existing house, you adjust your actions to the home, but building your own home allows the architect to mold it to your quirks.

In the beginning, you'll need to ask yourself what you really require and how involved you want to be. While the levels of homeowner involvement run the gamut, even the most hands-off custom homeowners will have a plethora of decisions to make. The most basic of these involves time, effort and money. Exactly how much of each of these are you willing to spend? Perhaps the biggest disappointment of building custom is when you don't have the financial resources to get what you want, so it's important to be upfront with your architect and builder about how much you can afford.

It's also important to manage your expectations. A custom home is a prototype, so when it's finished, you're living in the prototype. As a result, problems and unexpected situations are bound to arise, no matter how well you plan. If you foresee this, the journey will be a lot smoother and, having gone through the homebuilding process, you'll appreciate your one-of-a-kind home that much more.

ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

We've all heard the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." Building a custom home is something akin to that. It doesn't take a whole village, but it does require a host of experienced characters. While you know you'll need someone to design, build and decorate your custom home, you may not know where to start. Not surprisingly, there isn't a prescribed formula for hiring your team. Ask architects, and they'll tell you to hire an architect first. Ask builders, and they'll tell you the builder should be first. Ask interior designers and, yes, they too will tell you to start with them. From there, you may hire an automation consultant, lighting designer, sound engineer, landscape architect, feng-shui consultant or environmental advisor.

What's a homeowner to do? Architects can envision the spaces within the home and see how to best use the site; builders are better able to provide accurate cost estimates; and interior designers are experienced in the design of architectural interiors and furnishings. Architect Kristine Woolsey of Woolsey Studio suggests you start by brainstorming a list of all the things you hope this house will be for you. As you figure out your priorities, it should become clearer whom to hire first. Whichever order you choose, try to assemble your whole team right from the start, so the professionals can bring their unique talents to the table.

Why should a builder be involved during the design phase? Architect John Chonka of TrueOrder Architects provides a scenario. Say you have \$1 million to spend on your home. The architect knows what you want in your home and designs the plans accordingly. He sends the plans out to bid, and the bids come back at \$1.8 million—you probably aren't going to be happy, because now you have a design you love but can't afford. However, if you had a builder and an architect working together from the beginning, you would have gotten a more realistic picture of what you can get for your money without as much drama.

Even if you want to have your home designed before you commit to a builder, you might consider hiring a builder as a consultant for an hourly fee during the design phase, and then you can include him later as one of several bidders for the project. Doing this has another advantage, Woolsey says, because you get to see if you like working with him before you're committed. The same type of agreement can be arranged with an architect. You can hire one on an hourly basis to get through the initial phases, according to Chonka, and then, if you're pleased with the work, you can enter into a contract.

You may assume you don't need an interior designer until it's time for finishing touches, but you'll soon realize your folly. A good interior designer can envision the interior spaces to see things others wouldn't—like how the furniture you want will fit within certain rooms, the best locations for outlets and how rooms can be shaped