

REAL ESTATE NEWS



Penny & John
DUMKE
Fine Homes



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Building a Custom Home in Long Beach

In the process of building a custom home, I've learned a few things, uncovered some myths, and confirmed some of my original beliefs. Most importantly, I have learned that a good team of specialists is the solution to most every problem.

I correctly anticipated the level of complexity in building our first custom home. Yet despite over 3 years of planning, there were still more decisions than one person could handle. The range of problems are so diverse that no one could have the range of skills or experience. A team with a multitude of skills is required. The level of complexity only increases as the home's design and level of finish diverge from standard building practice. A cookie cutter design greatly reduces the level of complexity, but custom architecture requires many more decisions at each phase.

Our team consists of myself as project coordinator, superintendent, pseudo general contractor (GC) and most importantly, Mr. Money Bags. Followed by the framer (and real GC), architect, interior architect, and finally, all of the subcontractors. As the leader, I am only as good as my team.

For those of you thinking you would like to general your own home, I would like to formally talk you out of it. It was my original intent to general the whole job, and while I did handle a fair amount of the load, but not having an experienced general contractor (i.e. Fletcher - my framer and Real GC), would have been a train wreck. As a layman, I have a better skill set than most to fill in as GC. I have a mechanical engineering degree, a general contractor's

license, a flexible schedule allowing time on the job site, and great local connections due to my profession. Yet still, without Fletcher's knowledge and assistance, I would have been dead in the water. There is an interaction with all the subcontractors, inspections, known details and unknown details that requires experience to anticipate, coordinate and execute.

Together, I handled what coordination I could and then Fletcher would fill in the gaps and basically

save my butt, on a time and materials basis. This relationship has worked great. It has allowed me to be involved in a capacity that my skills allow and yet have somebody who has the nuts and bolts experience and ability to execute the missing pieces. Most importantly, Fletcher cares about the end result and is extremely conscientious. Not the adjectives that most people use to describe

their general contractor experience.

Having a GC on board for the inspections was critical. The inspection process is about the relationship between the GC and the inspector. Fletcher made it very clear to me right up front, "Don't ever try to slide something by an inspector, or be deceptive; if you do they can make things very difficult." Since our inspector trusted Fletcher, more leeway was given. The inspector knew Fletcher would handle any corrective action required. Even though I might have been on the property, and knew things were up to code, I didn't speak "inspector-eze". Having somebody capable of answering the inspector's questions needs to be present.



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To facilitate smooth inspections, Fletcher often sought the ruling of the inspector ahead of the schedule, allowing us to get each phase signed off and keep the project going. You want to avoid re-inspections. This can set you back several days and waist many hours. Usually inspections occur at the end of one work phase, and this phase needs to be approved before the next phase of construction can begin. So work comes to a grinding halt until that phase has been approved.

The balance of the team consists of the architect, interior architect and subcontractors. Many architects put out what I call cookie cutter homes. It's their job to give the clients what they want: a good floorplan, traditional design, and possibly some dormers for the cutesy factor. Our architect was a little different. He doesn't design Tudors, Spanish, Colonials, or Bungalows. He designs one thing; modern art. If you want anything other than modern art, get another architect. This was OK with us, we wanted modern.

True architects (as in artists) are a different breed. They are passionate about creating art as well as function. During our initial conversation, our architect, Robert, conveyed how serious he was about keeping the design pure. I asked him about roof lines and types of shingles. The room got quiet, he then looked at me with a dead pan seriousness that conveyed the gravity of the matter and said "Shingles.... I don't do shingles". What did I know? I don't design homes, but Robert was right, modern homes don't have shingles. It became very clear that he is extremely passionate about his work, like an artist he is committed to his vision.

The interior architect, Suzanne, was another critical component of our team. Just as Penny & I don't have degrees in architecture, we don't have degrees in interior design either. Many times we simply didn't have an opinion regarding some design choice. Having somebody like her on board who can select all of the finishes and make decisions was critical. She usually gave us several choices that would go with the overall design plan. When she asked us which choice we liked, we'd often look at her with a blank vacant stare and say, "We like what YOU like!". We've said this so many times that it has now become a joke, but none the less true. We love her selections. Given the literally thousands of tile choices, we would be sure to either screw it up or just take the safe road and pick some blah paint or tile color. Suzanne's knowledge and experience has maintained the integrity of the design. It has also saved us money since costly design mistakes can be avoided.

Lastly, are the many sub-contractors vital to the completion of the project. With only one exception, everybody on the job has been superb. Really! But oh that one. This particularly bad subcontractor absolutely drove me crazy. He was truly incompetent. Sloppy quality and lack of communication skills, caused much anguish and loss of sleep. Needless to say, he was the only one we fired. It turned out for the better because his replacement was awesome.

Which leads us full circle to my first conclusion; You are only as good as the people on your team.

Other thoughts

Budgeting: While a more basic addition can have a budget, a custom home with unique design features is a budgeting nightmare. How any general contractor can bid out a custom job is beyond me. I would imagine that most custom homes are not built on a fixed budget, but allow for budget changes as progress is made. There are an impossible number of details to anticipate and any builder that can give you a firm price on a custom home is either pulling a number out of a hat, or they have over 100 pages of firm bids with every possible detail listed. The process of analyzing the entire building process to give a reasonable bid would take over several hundred hours. I can't think of a contractor that has that much time. So the bottom line is that in a non-standard project, it is the owner that is going to have to take the risk regarding variations in price from original guesstimates. It doesn't mean that a budget shouldn't be done, it just means that the budget is only a guideline. Figure that your cost is going to be between \$150 - \$300+ per square foot to build a custom home.

Leaving one wall: Everybody seems to know about the leaving one wall theory to save on fees. It is true that your permitting fees are less for a remodel. But there is no truth to the one wall theory. Either your project is a remodel or it's new construction. To qualify as a remodel, you must leave 50% of the exterior walls of your existing home. You can probably get away with less because not many plan checkers know this 50% rule and many people have gotten by with less. But leaving 50% of the exterior walls is a huge constraint. Paying the additional permitting fees may be worth the freedom to create what you want.

Scheduling: Are you on schedule? This was one of the most commonly asked questions. To be perfectly honest, I never knew how to answer this question. My thought was.... what schedule? I simply scheduled the next job or trade required to complete the job. What am I supposed to do if a 2 week job takes 3 weeks? Flip out, get mad? What would be the point? The end result is that it is going to take about 1 year from start to finish.

Would we do it again? Definitely! It's a huge price to pay but you get what you want and to us it was worth it.

Please feel free to contact any of our team if your considering a new home or remodel, we highly recommend them:

Architect - Robert Trucios - 562-491-5373

Interior Architect - Suzanne Schafer - 562-433-5678

General Contractor - Fletcher Noel - 562-598-6333

If you have any questions regarding your home or any planned improvements, please don't hesitate to call. With our broad knowledge of Real Estate you will find us a valuable resource.

Market Activity

The following information is from the Multiple Listing Service as of 6/25/2003.

Address	Br/Bth	Sq Ft	Lot Size	List Price
Alamitos Heights				
668 Flint	2/2	1151	6500	414,900
734 Los Altos	2/2	1599	6499	449,000
340 Ultimo	3/2.5	1674	3250	469,900
700 Santiago	3/2	1810	3825	599,400
411 Flint	3/1.75	2037	6500	605,000
328 Ultimo	3/2.5	1824	3250	614,700
355 Winslow	3/2.5	2262	3250	648,000
807 Terraine	3/2	1725	3330	669,000
536 Terraine	3/2	1521	6500	769,900
601 Terraine	3/3	2803	9000	799,900
La Marina Estates				
1450 Hackett	3/2	1226	7150	435,000
Los Altos (S. Fwy)				
2431 Marber	2/2	1141	6120	325,000
1964 Tulane	2/1	1031	6530	339,900
2159 Greenbrier	3/1	1128	6510	345,000
2115 San Vicente	2/1	890	6200	349,900
5917 Marita	3/1	1062	6090	369,500
2191 Ocana	2/1.75	1176	6240	369,900
2309 Stearnlee	3/1	1367	6090	378,900
2261 Senasac	3/2		6000	379,900
5348 Pavo	3/1	1199	6380	382,000
1817 Ashbrook	2/2	1503	6000	388,000
1861 Snowden	3/1	989	6195	399,000
2420 Marwick	3/2	1476	6000	405,000
2400 San Anseline	3/1.75	1476	6000	410,000
2114 Tulane	3/2	1750	7200	450,000
2103 Fidler	3/2	1840	5775	459,000
6211 Fairbrook	4/2	1862	5930	459,900
5434 Garford	3/2	1786	6300	489,900
2431 Ocana	4/2.75	1961	6000	499,900
5315 Daggett	3/2	1550	5775	529,900
2137 Fidler	4/3	2116	5775	539,000
2286 Fanwood	5/4	2519	6000	589,900
2205 Tulane	4/3	2232	6090	719-749
University Park Estates / College Park				
787 Salida	3/3	1557	6410	475,000
6841 9th	4/2	1587	5985	515,000
816 Stevely	3/1.75	1859		537,500
834 Lees	4/2	1674	6156	540,000
411 Laurinda	4/2	1688	6380	549,900
6316 Collorado	4/2	238	6380	612,000
370 Peralta	4/2	1898	6380	615,000
664 Margo	4/3	2379	6600	649,900
321 Silvera	4/2.5	2301	7310	619,900
Park Estates				
5464 Oleta	3/2	1970	8450	665,000
1411 Greenbrier	3/2.5	2562	6900	674,000
5488 Oleta	4/3	2025	8450	685,000
5201 El Prado	4/4	2451	8830	749,000
5440 Las Lomas	3/2	2122	9100	769,000
5501 La Pasada	3/3	2209	8210	789,000
5520 Anahiem	3/2.5	2038	8200	849,000
1170 Bryant	4/3	2693	10512	1,075,000
1380 Los Altos	4/3.5	3263	9900	1,200,000
5500 El Jardin	3/3.5	3823	9410	1,200,000
1410 Bryant	4/3.5	4771	22500	2,695,000

Filing for a Variance

Should your proposed project not comply with city guidelines, you will need to file for a variance. The cost of filing for a variance is approximately \$850 plus \$50 for each additional non-conforming item.

Filing for a variance does not guarantee approval. The City of Long Beach applies strict rules to what they will approve. For more details, log on to the City web site (www.ci.long-beach.ca.us).

Look for "Standards Variance" under the Planning Department section.

The City's web site is a great resource to help with your building project. Many answers to your questions can be found on-line.

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With home prices doubling in the last 5 years, many homeowners are flush with equity and putting that cash to use.

Remodeling or rebuilding is always a daunting task. This month we would like to thank all the people who helped us in creating our dream home.

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