



photo by SEAN MCGINTY

MARK SMITH

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What is your favorite style of home to build?

Each home is uniquely tailored to the homeowners personal taste and style. At the beginning of the homebuilding process, I sit down with the homeowners and together we come up with a comprehensive plan. That plan incorporates their needs and desires but also takes into account the materials, designs, and special amenities. My sub-contractors and I also make suggestions knowing what has worked well on previous homes we've built. In general, I like a traditional house with stone and a cast stone exterior. The interior would have heavy wood moldings with lots of hard surface floors (wood, stone, and wood & stone mix). There is always elaborate trim work and custom craftsmanship with woodworking, cabinets, and many different finishes.

What Green Techniques and products do you use in your homes?

A green conceptual plan is designed for each home. It depends on what the homeowners needs will be. In our climate a high efficiency, HVAC system and well insulated doors and windows are crucial, and I am also a big believer in foam insulation with full incapsulation. The benefit of foam incapsulation is the attic stays nearly the same temperature as the interior of the home, which cuts down on energy use. Some clients want to take things further and I am just getting started on a very high-end home in Normandy Estates, that will make use of geothermal energy with pits 300 feet deep.

What are the current trends that you see in homebuilding?

Some of the trends that I'm seeing are; more concentration of family areas vs formal areas, quality materials, workmanship and detailing vs more quantity of square footage, less formal

It's all about building relationships and sharing respect.

dining and living areas, and overall smarter home designs. I also hear of some builders being overly creative with construction budgets. A builder might set the budget unrealistically low to get the job knowing full well they are going to have to go back to the client for an increase of funds mid-project. I have also have seen where the budget is set realistically but a spec item costing less from a vendor is used and the difference in the actual price and the budgeted price is pocketed. Either way the homeowner is not being treated fairly.

What makes your homes different from other builders and the competition? How do you position yourself in the market?

Well, I just do things a little differently than most builders. I have a lean business model and don't have a big staff. Homeowners interact directly with me and then I have a team of talented subcontractors, craftsman and suppliers who I utilize, they have worked with me for many years. It keeps my overhead low and allows me to focus on quality construction and pleasing my clients as opposed to constantly chasing a dollar. Also, I worked in the banking industry prior to becoming a builder in 1989, so I have insights into the financial aspect of homebuilding that can be helpful to my clients. The process of building a home with Mark Smith Custom Homes is different than it is with most other builders.

How do you think your homeowner's perceive you and your product?

I stay in contact with my homeowners and many have become great friends, almost like family. It's not unusual to find me playing golf or going on a hunting trip with someone who lives in a home I built. It makes me feel great when a working relationship turns into an ongoing friendship, and I consider it a testament to my integrity and the quality of workmanship my team and I bring to each project. To me, trust is the most important element in this relationship. Homebuilding should be fun and I would hope that many of my homeowners would say that they've had a pleasurable experience.

Do you have any favorite hobbies?

Outdoor sports like golfing and hunting. I've had some absolutely great times hunting in Alaska. That would definitely be my favorite place to hunt right now.

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MARK SMITH CUSTOM HOMES

A look inside this luxury custom builder's personal home

by KAREN LANCASTER | photos by SEAN MCGINTY

Ever wonder what kind of houses top builders create for themselves? We were invited into the residence of custom builder – and all-around good guy – Mark Smith for a look inside his own personal home.

Situated in Shoal Creek, the massive but elegant stone exterior is defined by a grand doorway crafted of custom beveled glass and warm wood surrounds. Visitors step inside to an expansive entry soaring two stories and flanked by a grand staircase and an expanse of hardwood flooring, arched doorways, textured walls, and eclectic finishes. Just beyond is a large living and dining area with views out to a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the beautifully landscaped lawn and pool area boasting an outdoor entertaining spot complete with flat-screen T.V. and cooking facilities. Here, an oversized fireplace commands one wall, creating a warm gathering place.

Back inside, entertaining possibilities are expanded further with the media room. Outfitted with a large 133-inch screen T.V. and flexible seating areas, the space is anchored in the rear by an inviting limestone and granite bar, creating yet another area for refreshments and conversation.

Adjoining is a warm kitchen finished with top-of-the-line appointments, opening onto a breakfast nook and living area that also are lined in floor-to-ceiling windows, offering abundant light and bringing the outdoors in.

Just off the entry is a cozy library that offers a more intimate gathering spot. Here, a wall of finely crafted cabinetry serves as a showcase for the collectibles he has accumulated during his travel and hunting trips.

Craftsmanship is extremely important, Smith says. “For both my own home and for those of my clients, quality

is key. I have an outstanding group of sub-contractors who I use for each and every project – I have the utmost respect for them and they take such pride in their work. After so many years working together, they know what I expect, the standards I have set, and that quality is the number one priority.” Smith has chosen to keep his company a manageable size so that he can always be a hands-on builder, and uses the same sub-contractors whether building a large, expensive home or working on a smaller project for a new homeowner.

It’s that commitment to quality that has earned him so many word-of-mouth referrals from satisfied clients ranging from CEOs of major public companies to high-profile sports figures. “I guess I am most proud of the fact that many of my former homebuilding clients have become really good friends,” says Smith. “My customers, my product and my in-



Top-tier finish-outs and an eclectic mix of materials are hallmarks of the projects completed in the area's most outstanding neighborhoods by Mark Smith Custom Homes.

tegrity mean everything to me, and my clients know that my word is my bond.”

His reputation for exceeding expectations led to his newest project, a 16,000- square-foot state-of-the art home in West Plano. “This newest property is located in Normandy Estates, a luxury gated community on 75 acres of rolling

terrain with mature trees, a pond with fishing dock, and winding creek. It’s a one-of-a-kind residential community that has been built using one of the last parcels of remaining land in West Plano,” says Smith. “The location near Midway and Spring Creek is incredible – with easy access to the Shops of Legacy, the





Maxed-out amenities and luxury detailing are key to the success of area homebuilder Mark Smith. For more information on his projects, visit www.marksmithcustomhomes.com.

Legacy Business Park and other popular venues – and it is just three minutes to both Highway 121 and the North Dallas Tollway. It's an oasis right in the middle of Plano.”

This new home in Normandy Estates is being personalized to the tastes and needs of his discerning clients, with two separate elevations featuring stone and cast-stone exteriors, superior finish-outs including heavy moldings, beams, hardwood and stone floors, and an elegant outdoor living area with decorative columns framing motorized screens for year-round enjoyment.

“My clients for this new house are very energy-conscious, so we are utilizing several options to enhance that. For insulation, we are using foam encapsulation to protect the entire home. The attic temperature will be able to stay within just a few degrees of the main living space temperatures. We are also installing geothermal heating and air-conditioning, drilling 300-foot wells to accommodate the system,” says Smith. “It’s a little more expensive upfront, but so energy-efficient in the long run, and the benefits are amazing. They will have heated floors throughout the home and



outdoor living areas, offering warmth through the stone floors in the winter months.” Prices start at \$1.5 million for a Mark Smith Custom Home in Normandy Estates.

Having begun his personal career in banking, Smith has found that being attuned to the financial side of the business has brought him added credibility among a range of clients. In fact, he was recently asked by a bank to take over an unfinished 20,000 square foot project in Bartonville, near Flower Mound. “It was a \$3.5 million residence that was only half-done when the bank called me in, and they just let me use my own judgement in getting it finished. They trusted me to do the right thing.” And that trust was obviously well-founded. Smith completed the project within budget, and the bank got a contract on it 30 days after completion.

“It’s all about building relationships and sharing respect,” says Smith. With a body of work that includes homes in premier neighborhoods like Shoal Creek, Starwood and Chapel Creek in Frisco, and now Normandy Estates in Plano, Mark Smith Custom Homes is continuing its tradition of excellence. For more information, contact Mark Smith at (214) 533-4405 or visit his website at www.marksmithcustomhomes.com.

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