



# Creativity Marks Stonehenge Classic Homes

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Every builder seems to have niche, something that sets a particular builder apart from others. For David Crow, president of Stonehenge Classic Homes, it's his creativity and problem solving.

"I get referred because of my creative visions and ability to solve issues that arise in the industry. Creativity and problem solving are definitely key aspects that have built my business and why people hire me."

He noted that he does a lot of design work during the building process, complementing the work of architects, designers and decorators who may also be working on the home he's building.

"Some clients may have built a custom home before and are using designers and decorators that they're comfortable with. Other clients don't understand how to pull it all together. I assist them in finding other professionals to assist, and I'm also the creative guy who helps clients make decisions. I offer help by providing conceptual sketches, product demonstrations and even on-site mock-ups to help

clients visualize the finished product. Clients call me to ask, 'Can you meet me and talk it through?' I fill the void of what customers need."

David said he likes to incorporate something with a historical aspect in every house he builds, which is no surprise for a company with the motto "building things that stand the test of time" and a primary reason for his using Stonehenge in the company name. He noted that he has gone to Round Top, Texas, with clients to locate interesting antique pieces. He said he likes to repurpose those pieces to give the house a special component that may become a conversation piece.

Along with his creative ability, David ranks his focus on producing high quality, long-lasting projects as a reason he is able to rely on referrals instead of advertising. He noted that many of his clients are friends or friends of friends. "Most of my clients know past clients. We tend to travel in the same social circle."

Crow said a majority of his business is concentrated in the



West University neighborhood, which makes his operations more efficient. It's also where he and his family live.

Crow said that his philosophy is to ensure that his custom homes and remodeling/addition projects are done right the first time. "I'm not the Maytag repair man, but I have no need for a full-time customer service guy because most of my houses have few problems. We do take care of our clients if any problems arise"

As president, Crow is involved in all aspects of the business, although he has assembled a good team to insure things run smoothly. He gets assistance on estimating from his two construction supervisors, Rick Crawford and Mark Hall, who also manage the on-site operations. Rick and Mark have a combined experience of over 40 years. Vanessa Eubank, the office manager, handles billing, customer assistance and overall organization, among other duties.

Debbie Crow, David's wife, also helps with the business in addition to her own real estate sales position with Martha Turner Sotheby's International Realty. Debbie assists with business needs, land acquisitions for any speculative homes that Stonehenge Classic Homes builds, as well as marketing and selling the houses.

He builds in all styles but gravitates to architecture and interiors with a timeless appeal. He personally prefers a European flavor in his spec homes, although he doesn't like to build the same spec house over and over again. "I feel I owe it to my clients to make each home 'special' so they know they are not buying a cookie-cutter spec home. It makes things harder than repeating great houses that work, but I like the challenge."

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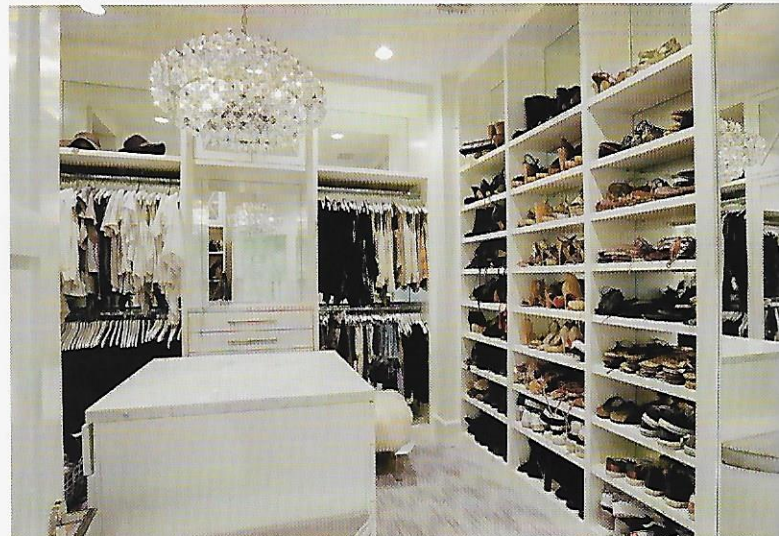
Currently Crow has two spec homes underway, along with three custom homes and five renovation or addition projects. He prefers to have about 10 projects in process at any one time; he's learned that's a comfortable number for him and his staff to manage and give the appropriate level of personal attention to their clients. "There's only so much I can handle. Bigger is not better for me."

That number of projects also enables David to make sure his subcontractors have enough work to keep them fed and loyal to Stonehenge Classic Homes. He finds that sharing some of the subcontractors with just a few other builders works well for scheduling. He noted that he has employed some of his subs since starting his company back in 1995, but he makes sure that the subs stay up on the latest techniques, use the best equipment and keep improving their skills. "I am very loyal, but they too need to be loyal and keep getting better."

His custom home projects typically range from 3,500 to 7,500 square feet and from \$1.5 million to \$5 million+. He also does remodeling and additions ranging from \$250,000 to well over \$1 million. Currently, many of his clients in the West University market are obtaining adjacent lots and expanding an existing house across property lines, a new concept that is growing.

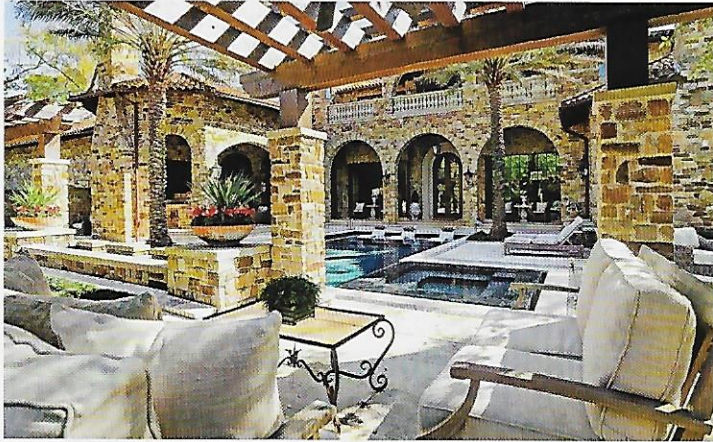
Crow started in the building industry after graduating from Louisiana State University in 1989. He had studied both architecture and engineering before settling on a business degree with a concentration in finance. He moved to Houston from Baton Rouge without a job and found his calling as a builder by answering a want ad in the Houston Chronicle.

He worked for General Homes, Houston's largest production builder, as a customer service representative, construction manager and project manager for three years as the company went through Chapter 11 bankruptcy restructuring. According to Crow, he learned a lot because the company shed employees, and those who were left had to pick up the slack.



He then worked for a start-up production builder for several more years before going out on his own in 1995. He got tired of building production homes where the homebuyers had no chance to make any decisions. "It was kind of boring to me that the buyer couldn't customize at all." His first few years being involved in starting a business were tough, but once the list of satisfied clients starting growing, so did the business.

"I always knew that I wanted to have my own business, to be an entrepreneur. I watched my dad get forced into early retirement after 35 years in sales with one company in Ohio. I wanted to have control over my life."



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