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What Homebuyers Want in 2024

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Design Your Dream Home

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How Much House Can You Get for Your Money?

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STRICTLY NATURAL LIGHT. BY COSTA CHRIST

Creating Your Dream Home

Embarking on a new build or large-scale renovation and not sure where to start? Consider these **SIX NORTH TEXAS DESIGN FIRMS**.

By **CATHERINE WENDLANDT**



IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, you've probably seen DIYers broadcasting their remodel — or even a whole house build — in a series of 20-part, minute-long clips. And sure, most of us can tackle small remodels like painting a room, building some shelves or, for the really ambitious, maybe replacing a door or two. But when you're looking to take a recently purchased home down to the studs, building a new home or even just adding onto an existing home, the reality is, it takes a team of experts to plan and execute the project.

"People think that they can [manage it all] themselves," architect and interior designer Chad Dorsey says. However, most people don't have the time to oversee such a huge project on top of their normal lives. Plus, there's so much the average person doesn't know about the construction process, says builder Kurt Bielawski, including how weather impacts timelines. Or the fact that, if you're renovating an old house, there's always some nasty surprise just waiting to be discovered.

East Dallas resident Michelle Ball worked with architecture design firm VeuxDeux Design when she did a nearly 800-square-foot addition to her historic Junius Heights bungalow. When construction began, they discovered that parts of the foundation had rotted out — and the house wasn't actually secured to it. The house had to be lifted and the foundation repoured, says VeuxDeux architect Leslie Nepveux.

In a large project like Ball's, there's typically the architect who masterminds the structural design; the builder who brings that vision to life; and then, if you really want to ensure a cohesive, sophisticated look, an interior designer who picks out all the tiles, paint, fixtures, flooring and more. And all three work together to tackle the unexpected challenges that no doubt will arise along the way.

There's debate over whether you should start with a builder or an architect. Getting a builder early can help drive decisions, says architect Harris Briggs. Plus, making sure your personality fits with the builder is essential for a good experience. Others say to start with an architect, come up with a plan and then bid out contractors. The upside to this is that the architect design firm you work with may have suggestions on builders.

Either way, the most important thing is to choose a team you can trust and that shares your vision. Here are six respected Dallas-based firms that are primed and ready to take on your next build.

FROM LEFT: WAWAN HERI CAHYANA; HARRIS BRIGGS



HARRIS BRIGGS' FIRM embraces the heritage of classical architecture while infusing designs with innovative elements.



Briggs Architecture & Design

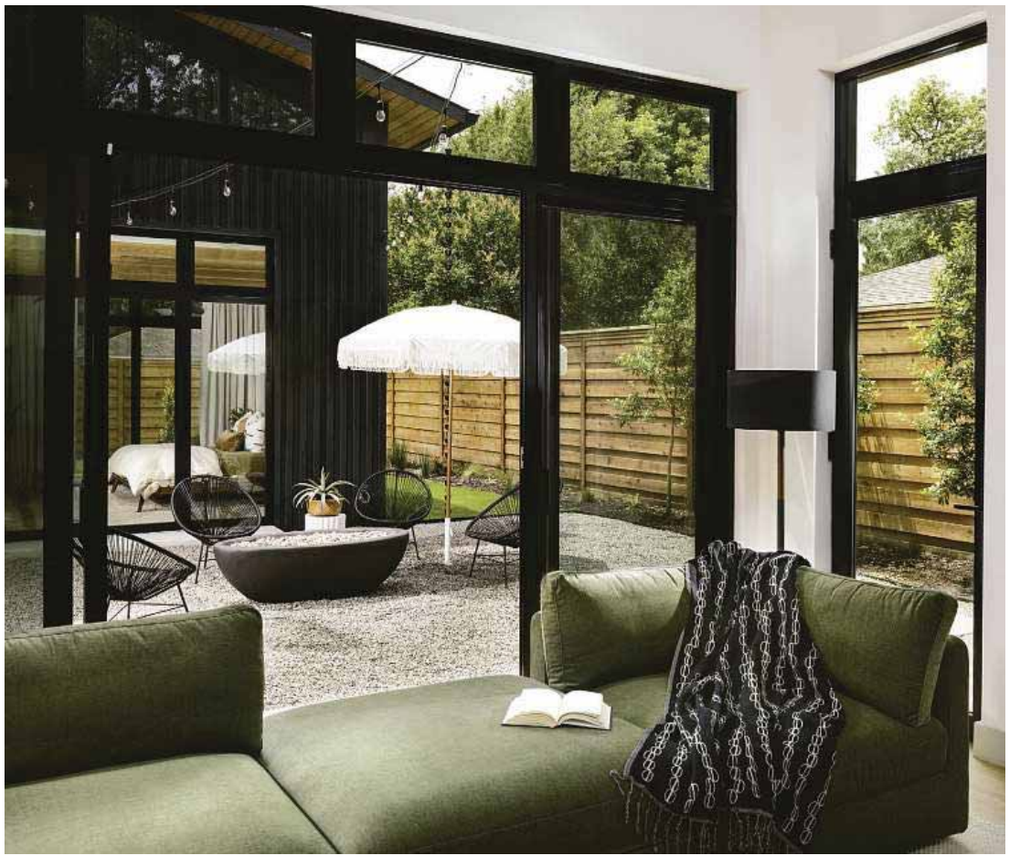
A "NEW AMERICAN" AESTHETIC
briggsad.com

There's no project too big or too small for Briggs Architecture & Design, formerly known as William S. Briggs Architect. For nearly 30 years, the firm has brought its trademark style to everything from powder bath renovations to full estate builds. "We do everything on both sides of the scale," says Harris Briggs, the firm's principal.

Briggs took over the firm from his father, William S. Briggs, around two years ago. He and his team of seven mostly do exterior and interior architecture, "with a light side of design." They can provide basic interior design services, like picking finishes, or collaborate with the client's chosen interior designer throughout the project.

Briggs describes the firm's aesthetic as "New American." It has elements of traditional and American architecture, he says, without the weightiness of it. "It feels really timeless, but it lives very current."

This style, he says, is characterized by thoughtful proportion and attention to detail. For example, a space might still have classic moldings, just on a smaller scale. Rooms will have individual personality but a cohesiveness throughout. And if multiple styles suit both the home and a client's preferences — say, archways and French molding in a Georgian-style residence — the team will make it happen.



FROM THE INITIAL ARCHITECTURE to final touches on landscaping, Maestri Studio is involved in every step.

Maestri Studio

HIGH STYLE WITH A HOLISTIC APPROACH
maestristudio.com

When Eddie Maestri and his team begin a project, they consider "the entire design," he emphasizes. Architecture, interior design, furnishings, landscaping: It's all within the purview of Maestri Studio. That holistic, turnkey approach is centered around the question of how you experience living in a space, notes Maestri.

The firm's attention to detail and commitment to reflect the owner's personality make each project highly unique. And while the firm takes on both new builds and renovations, Maestri especially enjoys breathing new life into historic properties. "I really like working on homes that do have a good story, and [I] want to honor that," he says.

Travel and historic styles are common sources of inspiration in his work; Maestri also looks to the surrounding community. With any home, "we try really hard to complement the neighborhood," he says. He and his team will often drive the streets surrounding the lot, pulling features from the nearby homes, so that their design will fit in seamlessly — meanwhile, inside, the house is one of a kind.

ROOMS CREATED BY Briggs Architecture & Design have individual personalities, but there's also cohesion throughout the home.

FROM LEFT: HARRIS BRIGGS; JENIFER MCNEIL BAKER



UPDATES TO HISTORIC HOMES, like this 1916 Vickery Place property renovated by Leslie Nepveux, require specialized knowledge and design sensibilities.

VeuxDeux Design

NEW CHAPTERS FOR HISTORIC HOMES

veuxdeuxdesign.com

If you purchase an older home in a conservation or historic district, you need a professional who understands both the design sensibilities and the ins and outs of community requirements. Leslie Nepveux has worked heavily in East Dallas historic renovations (such as Michelle Ball's home) since launching her architecture firm around seven years ago.

Since then, her husband Nick has come on board, and together they offer custom architecture as well as interior design on select projects. They work with all styles and have expanded their service area across D-FW, but historic remodels remain a favorite. They're "like a puzzle," Nepveux says.

That's true not only for the design but also for the approval process. Nepveux says it can be confusing, but she prides herself on navigating the city's Landmark Commission (responsible for making decisions about Certificate of Appropriateness applications within Dallas historic districts and individually designated structures). For conservation districts, the commission wants to see plans, she says. For historic districts, "they will have a lot more to say about your design."

When renovating historic houses, Nepveux likes to preserve original details, like trim, and mix in more modern elements. She also prefers to maintain some of the visual separation characteristic of older houses. So if you're converting your floor plan into an open layout, she might suggest cased openings between rooms.

These projects can be tricky, but Nepveux enjoys finding solutions that allow owners to enjoy the best of both eras. "It's a way to preserve the history of a place," she shares, "but also make things functional for 21st-century living."

Pro Tips

DO YOUR RESEARCH. It's easy to search online for an architect, builder or designer, but it's best to get recommendations from someone you know and trust. Paul Vetter of AMDG Studio says he gets most of his clients through word of mouth. If you find someone online, always ask to speak to past clients.

As previously noted, there are mixed opinions on whether you should start with a builder or an architect. Whichever way you go, get the rest of the team assembled early so everyone can be on the same page.

ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS. "From a homeowner's perspective, there are no dumb questions," says East Dallas resident Michelle Ball, who called on VeuxDeux Design to work on a historic property. Don't be afraid to have your contractors explain something to you. "You don't want to get to the end of something or even just one element," she says, "and have it be wrong."

TRY TO AVOID A PIECEMEAL PROJECT. If you're renovating an older home you've purchased, do as much of the project as you can afford in one phase. If you remodel room by room — say, the kitchen one year and a bathroom the next — you'll be living in a constant construction zone. That approach can also cost you more in the long run, if you have to keep calling the same subcontractors to come back when they could have completed their work all at once.

FROM LEFT: THE ENGLISH DEN; STRICTLY NATURAL LIGHT. BY COSTA CHRIST



Studio Thomas James

SLEEK, MASCULINE-LEANING DESIGN
studiothomasjames.com

Boutique interior design firm Studio Thomas James has taken on projects all over the world, but Dallas is home. And founder Philip Thomas Vanderford will do much more than stylishly furnish yours. The firm primarily works on new builds and to-the-studs renovations.

While Studio Thomas James isn't an architecture firm, Vanderford and his team work closely with a project's architect to tweak plans to better accommodate distinctive molding, cabinetry or room spacing. "We're usually intimately editing the architectural plans," he says.

Those who choose Vanderford as their designer tend to seek out an edgier, more masculine aesthetic. "If you want it pink and blue and sweet, there's probably a lot of other people that could do better than me," Vanderford says, noting that his designs are more pared down than heavy, busy traditional styles. But they're "still layered, to a degree. It's not just 'one book on the table.'"

It can be a delicate dance, he adds, mixing traditional and classic elements with an "of the moment" feel. But the result is always striking. Picture one of Vanderford's kitchen renovations, for example: He mixed a modern light fixture and a waterfall marble island with a more traditional reeded oak cabinetry. It's all about design with a soul.

PHILIP THOMAS VANDERFORD'S designs meld a focus on form and function, with a distinctly masculine edge.



More Design + Build and Chad Dorsey Design

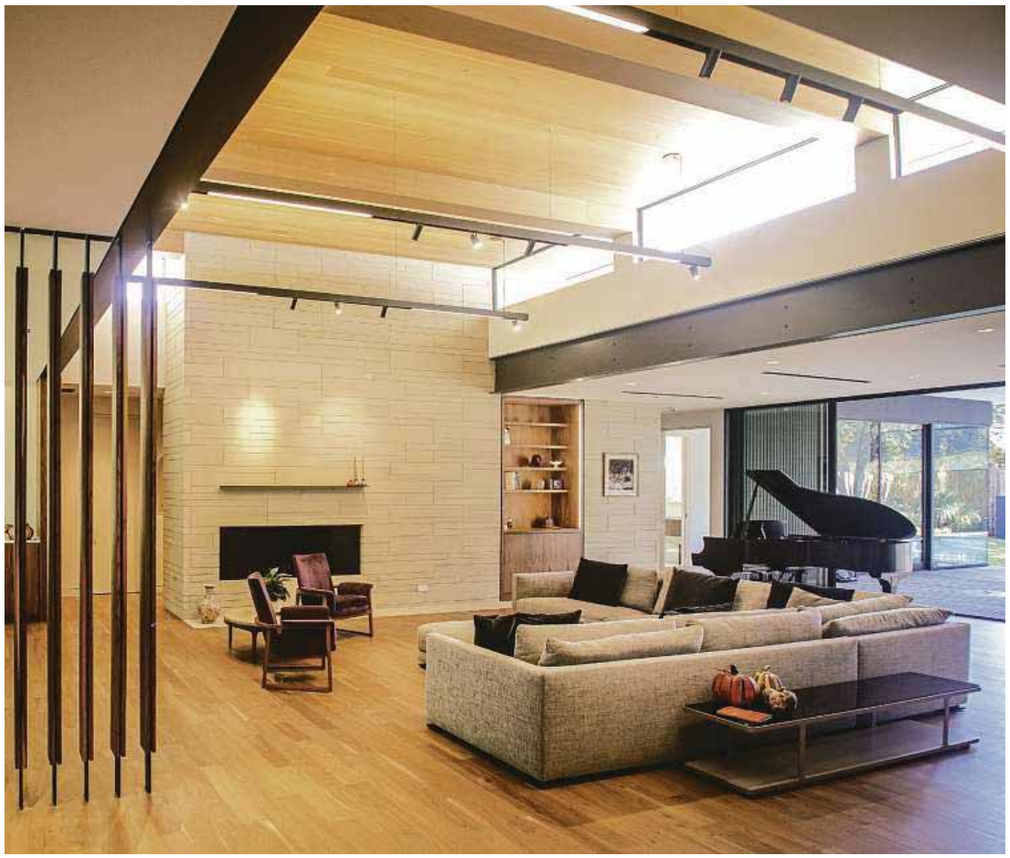
LUXURY WITH A HAND-CRAFTED TOUCH
moredesignbuild.com, chaddorseydesign.com

Kurt Bielawski and Chad Dorsey are a one-stop shop. The pair co-founded architecture and construction firm More Design + Build in 2005. Then in 2018, Dorsey launched his eponymous design studio.

Together, they offer architecture, full construction, interior design and furnishings. So whether you are undertaking a gut renovation or a new build, they'll be your partners from start to finish, Bielawski says. They understand all the roles in the building or remodeling process — and have professional experience in each.

Dorsey describes their look as curated and timeless, whatever the actual style; he never wants a home to feel like it was created in a specific era. And while you can count on a luxury finish, it's a "relaxed luxury," Dorsey notes. He'll work with metalworkers, leathersmiths and other artisans to create details like leather-wrapped handrails or metal paneling.

"At the end of the day," Dorsey says, "it has this very handcrafted feel that ages beautifully, and it really gives your space something that is original and someone doesn't have down the street."



A SUBTLE, RELAXED luxury distinguishes projects by Chad Dorsey Design and More Design + Build.

FROM LEFT: CODY ULRICH; DAN FINNELL

PAUL VETTER'S WORK focuses on resource-efficient design and modern Texas regionalism.

AMDG Studio

GREEN HOMES WITH TEXAS FLAIR
amdgstudio.com

AMDG Studio architect Paul Vetter spent much of his career working for firms that focus on the green design movement or Texas Modernism. Vetter describes his own style as a melding of the two.

Championed by architectural legends like O'Neil Ford, Texas Modern architecture emphasizes local materials (such as Hill Country limestone) and natural light (floor-to-ceiling windows are common). Vetter puts a priority on ideal sightlines and making the outdoors part of the room.

LEED certified, Vetter also designs for energy conservation. Spray foam insulation below the roof does wonders to block heat. "If you think of the building as a Yeti cooler, it creates this thermal envelope," Vetter says. He also designs according to the house's orientation and uses cantilevered overhangs — another characteristic of Texas Modernism — to protect the home from the sun.

A one-man band at AMDG Studio, which he launched in 2019, Vetter works on new builds and remodels. He likes to stay on a project through construction. Though he's not an interior designer, he'll work with clients on finishes and materials inside and out.

While each project ends up unique, Vetter's process always starts the same way: talking to the client and "identifying what's truly important to them and then how as an architect I can help with that."