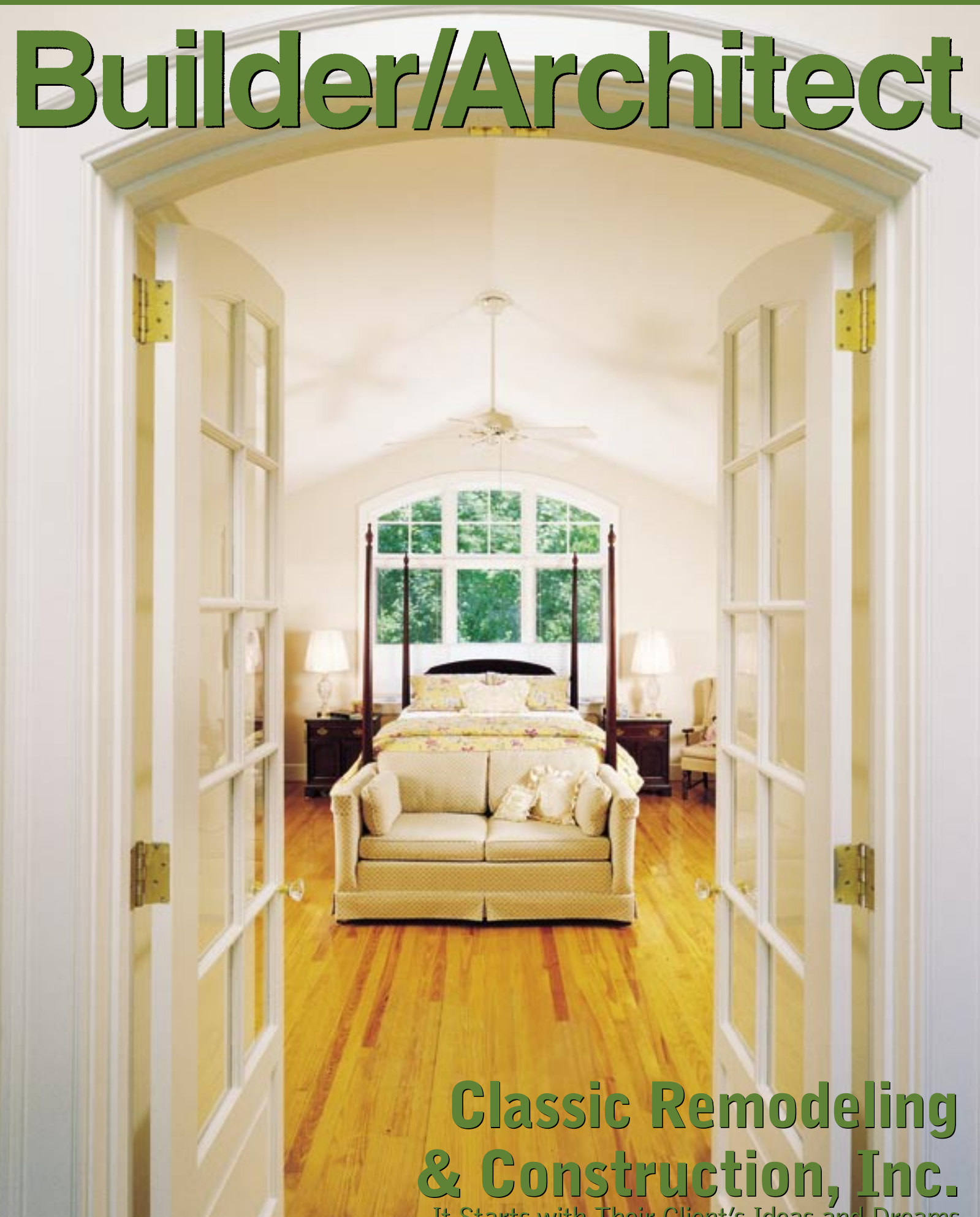


Builder/Architect



**Classic Remodeling
& Construction, Inc.**
It Starts with Their Client's Ideas and Dreams

Not a reproduction, but a reconstruction. All the wood in this scene — floor, walls and rafters — was hand hewn over 150 years ago, and was recently restored and reconstructed by Classic Remodeling & Construction for a client passionate about authenticity.



Classic Remodeling & Construction, Inc.

It Starts with Their Client's Ideas and Dreams

Bob Fleming founded Classic Remodeling & Construction, Inc. in 1989, and since that time his company has been honored countless times by peer organizations on the local, regional and national level. (Amongst these accolades was the recognition by a leading national remodeling periodical as being among the Top 50 remodelers in the nation, and recently *Southern Living* magazine chose several of Classic's projects to receive The Chrysalis Award, denoting remodeling excellence in the South.) Yet, when asked why he chose the remodeling business for his life's work, he paused for a long time to reflect on his answer. "I suppose it is because it is just a perfect fit for me: it is an environment where I can maximize those personal talents and strengths that we all have been given as individuals, and it allows me to realize those things that are most rewarding to me." He went on to explain that he felt that nothing could be more rewarding than to sit down with a client who has only a vague idea of how they want to change their home to better meet their expectations and lifestyle, and then to seamlessly carry that dream or idea through design and construction to fruition.

Mr. Fleming will soon have been involved in the remodeling business for three decades. He graduated from Clemson University in 1979 with a degree in building science; however, his preparation for this occupation started much earlier. His parents reported that from his youngest days he liked to put things together. As a child of 2 or 3 years old he loved to reassemble wooden puzzles, but soon became bored with just one, and would mix three or four puzzles together and work on all at the same time. He now credits encouragement of this early behavior for developing a mind that works spatially and an ability to quickly visualize on a three-dimensional basis. Throughout high school one of his major hobbies was building cabinetry and other woodworking. Also during those years he worked for a home builder in Mount Pleasant with the special task of working punch lists, so even as a teenager he was visiting finished homes to figure out what was wrong in the house and how to fix it.

In its 17 years, Classic Remodeling & Construction has realized spectacular growth in size and sophistication to become the largest design-build remodeling contractor of their type in the Charleston area. Bob recalls that when the company was started there were just three people: himself and two helpers. In those days it was much more hands-on because it was he that went to the lumberyard to pick up supplies and it was he that did most of the demolition. Now Classic Remodeling & Construction is not just three people, but three dozen individual team members

with proven professional talents. In 1989 Classic's paperwork was minimal; plans for projects may even have been from a sketch drawn on a napkin. Today the company uses advanced technology to create plans, generate three-dimensional renderings for clients, track daily on-time progress reports, and closely monitor budgets. In the early years a job with a budget of \$50,000 created real excitement, and although they still find challenges in that size job, in recent years several jobs budgeted at \$500,000 might be in progress at any given time. "Of course we are a much different company. To design and run these larger jobs requires an entire team. Recent years have been much more rewarding for me, and although I miss the day-to-day work with my hands, now I am allowed to spend more time in the creative end of the business that I find so very rewarding," Bob explained.

Another reward of their success is a brand new location on Johns Island that has been built to be consistent with the unique integrated business model that Mr. Fleming and his team have developed to offer their special "seamless" delivery to their clients. The facility includes a two-story, 3,700-square-foot office area with various departmental sections and a 5,000-square-foot warehouse area that contains a special 700-square-foot classroom to be used for on-site training. "We have taken great care in design and construction of this new facility to make sure that it expresses to clients the quality of product we deliver and our commitment to professional service. This period building, an Arts and Craft bungalow from the 1920s, has been a personal dream of mine for several years, and our planning to create a separate area for training is a step ahead of most, if not all, design-build remodelers in the nation," Mr. Fleming stated.

THE DESIGN-BUILD CONCEPT IN REMODELING

During the early years, although Bob always worked with clients to develop their dreams and ideas into practical plans, it was necessary to contract with various outside draftsmen to generate the working drawings. "At some point I realized that the client might not be best served unless these services were under the same roof," Mr. Fleming stated. This led to the growth of Classic's design team. The process of designing for new residential construction and remodeling is completely different from new construction, because in remodeling you are merging new elements with an existing structure. Problems pop up on any construction job, new or remodeled, but the frustration can be especially stressful for clients who inhabit the house during remodeling. "We

A Most Challenging Project: Disassemble, Move and Reassemble a 150-Year-Old Cottage

"Although the core of our business is design-build of additions and remodeling, we occasionally get involved with projects that don't fit in that area. We had already done several separate projects for Neil and Janie Kruse when he approached us with a very unique challenge," Bob Fleming recalled. Mr. Kruse had acquired a dilapidated 150-year-old planter's cottage near Clio, SC, and wanted to move it to an island adjacent to property he owned on Johns Island. Because he was not interested in a reproduction, but wanted the 900-square-foot moved and reconstructed in a historically consistent manner, he had already begun the disassembly with meticulous accuracy, marking each piece of wood by stamping a brass tag with its exact position in the old structure. When he realized how daunting the task would be, he called Bob, saying, "You are probably going to think that I am crazy, but let me tell you what I want to do!" Mr. Fleming admits that he felt compelled to explain to his friend and client that a replica of the building could be built more economically. "But because he was so excited and passionate about the project, we agreed to work with him," Bob explained. A Classic Remodeling crew assisted him with the remaining 80 percent of the piece-by-piece disassembly and cataloging of the wooden structure that had been mostly hand hewn with axe and adze. Many boards had deteriorated and some

were rotted. It was difficult to show their client that some wood was just not usable because he was so adamant that he wanted the reconstructed building to be exactly the same when transported to Johns Island. The old cottage originally had four fireplaces and because the reconstructed building would be elevated 14 feet above the ground, it was necessary to eliminate all but one. It required two 40-foot shipping containers to transport all the pieces of the small cottage, including the 500-plus members of the open roof truss system.

Surprisingly, the disassembly was not the most challenging part of the project. The containers could be brought no closer than 1,400 feet from the new site. Each piece had to be moved across a very narrow 1,000-foot-long bridge and then another 400 feet across the island. It required an entire day, using five riding concrete transporters to pour the foundation. The wood in both the floors and the walls of the old cottage were long leaf heart pine that has a beautiful, dark orange-red glow, but they had been painted over several times. Classic Remodeling artisans took each usable piece back to their shop and carefully re-planed and refinished the wood, leaving just a small amount of the original paint on each board. Many of the flooring boards had rotted and most of the tongues were damaged; it was necessary to send them out to a mill to be planed, cut down some, and re-tongued. In the end, there was enough of both wall boards and flooring to complete the main living room in the reconstructed cottage. The addition of a kitchen and indoor plumbing to the old cottage brought the total square footage from 900 to 1,150, plus porches on all sides that will wrap this beautiful structure for another 150 years.

Bob Fleming sums up the completed project, "Even after learning that he was seriously ill, Neil spent several days out on the island working right alongside us to complete the cottage that he loved so very much. I believe this passion extended his life. Yes, it was a challenging project, but our business really boils down to turning people's dreams into reality and we did our very best."

Left: This "Planter's Cottage" built sometime between 1840 and 1860 in Marlboro County, SC was completely disassembled, transported in containers, and then reconstructed on one of the barrier islands by Classic Remodeling & Construction.

Below: The 150-year-old cottage after reconstruction on "Pumpkin Island," which is part of Hopkinson Plantation on Johns Island.



learned that when the craftsman and the designer have experience communicating with one another and are functioning from the same playbook, the time required to resolve problems is greatly reduced, as is the frustration to the client,” Bob confidently explains. “So, over the last decade we have grown our design staff and have developed an integrated team system that can deliver a great finished job, of any size, in an almost frustration-free manner for our clients.”

The system, or method of operation, is built around several distinct job areas, each having well defined individual and shared responsibilities for each team member. “I could not describe our business with an organizational chart of lines and boxes; perhaps our methods could be graphically drawn on a horizontal line with converging circles for each team classification, but the degree of convergence or overlapping of those circles changes on each project,” Mr. Fleming explained. “Development and refinement of our design-build system was motivated by our desire to eliminate as much anxiety as possible for our clients, and although it results in a savings of both time and money, these were not our goals. Our goal was to make the process easy for the homeowner by minimizing the number of people they communicate with and still be kept fully abreast of progress.”

First, project consultants conduct initial client meetings to determine needs and expectations and then work with designers to develop preliminary sketches and proposed budgets. The designers create “as built” plans of the existing structure and the final working plans. Selection coordinators work closely with clients throughout the project in the selection of all options in design materials and colors, assisting with these difficult and often frustrating decisions. Project managers work with other team members in job pricing and budgeting and are responsible for the critical path plan on each of their assigned projects. They make sure that materials and manpower are on the project at the right time. Unique to the design-build system at Classic are the project craftsmen who are working craftsmen that are on a single project from start to finish. They are responsible for overseeing all activity on the project and interacting with the client on all progress and problems. Although all of Classic’s project craftsmen are skilled woodworkers, they are also people with good communication skills and proven empathy for the client.

Classic Remodeling’s design-build system incorporates all of the skilled personnel necessary to complete projects with their own full-time team members, and other than a select group of subcontractors from the specialty trades of electrical, plumbing, HVAC, roofing and

custom cabinets, they rarely need to contract outsiders. A smoothly running team has been built. “We often get letters of appreciation, addressed to me, but they rarely mention what an insightful guy I am or how much they appreciate my contribution to the realization of their dream. The letters most often praise the on-site team members — ‘tell them thank you’ or ‘We can’t tell you how much we enjoyed working with ...’ — and it is these letters that make me feel that we are doing it right!” Bob proudly stated.

The diversity of projects done by Classic Remodeling & Construction is tremendous. Currently, clients are most often requesting a more open floor plan and living space. Usually this includes integrating the kitchen with family room and oftentimes incorporating some form of an extension into an outdoor space, such as a deck, patio, enclosed porches or even swimming pool areas. Improvements to, or the creation of, a master bedroom suite are also regularly sought after remodeling projects. These include expansion of master baths and creating new his and her areas such as enlarged closet spaces. Classic recently did

a major master suite project where the roof of a split-level home was torn off and an entire new story was created to accommodate the new living area. The end result was that the exterior of this older home, in a great traditional Charleston neighborhood, was greatly improved.

Bob is proud of the bonds that are formed between clients and Classic. “When you work on a project in someone’s home over several months, close relationships are built,” Bob explained. “Later when

they really need our help and we have the capability to help, even work outside our comfort area, we feel compelled to do so.” One example would be the disassembling of a 150-year-old cottage, moving all the pieces 200 miles, and rebuilding it on a new, elevated foundation on a small island off Johns Island. Another is a complete restoration, budgeted at over \$1.5 million, for a client whose home was severely damaged by a fire caused by lighting.

ON BEING A LEADER

Being a leader within your industry is determined by many factors; however, gross revenue, number of employees, or even the number of awards received may not be the best indicators. The surest indication of leadership is when one’s peers request your active involvement in associations whose purpose is the betterment of the entire industry. Certainly by this measure, Robert D. Fleming, Jr. can be considered a leader within the remodeling industry. Bob is a Life Director and board member of the Charleston Trident Home Builders Association, where he



An example of Classic Remodeling inside and out. This pool surround, with water fall, and pool house are lighted exquisitely to create a beautiful space for both family fun and entertaining guests.

PHOTO BY RICK RHODES

has been an active member for 13 years, and his peers within this association named his company “Remodeler of the Year” for four consecutive years. He is also a member of a national group known as the Remodelers Advantage Roundtable, made up of several small groups of 12 company members; their purpose is to better their industry and individual businesses through the sharing of best business practices. Bob’s company has been active in this industry cornerstone for over 14 years. The group is comprised of 180 top notch companies that each meet twice annually. Classic Remodeling was honored to host their group for the fall meeting at their new facility this year.

Bob is passionate about his association with the new American College of the Building Arts (ACBA), located in Charleston and graduating its first class of four-year students in the spring of 2008. Being a trustee and serving on the Executive Committee of the college does not mean just attending monthly or quarterly meet-

Bob Fleming with a group of designers and project managers, the creative team members that are the core of his design-build firm, are pictured at the entry way to Classic Remodeling and Construction’s new facility on Johns Island. The new offices and warehouse total almost 10,000 square feet. The office area is housed in an “Arts and Craft” bungalow which is reminiscent of buildings in the 1920s and serves as a definition of this company’s meaning of tasteful design and quality building.



ings: Bob devotes several hours each week to work for the fledgling school. Why? “I believe very strongly in the principles on which this new college was founded, which is the restoration of older values of hands-on craftsmanship and understanding a building’s architectural heritage,” Mr. Fleming said. The American College of the Building Arts has clearly stated its philosophy. They are intent on graduating well-rounded, highly qualified and knowledgeable artisans who can utilize materials to high levels of sophistication and become leaders in the process of creating and preserving our building legacy. In its infancy, nothing could be more valuable to this college than the time volunteered by leaders like Bob Fleming.

THE FUTURE

The people of the nation and the Lowcountry are coming to realize the costs and effects of sprawl and are turning their interest back to the center city and the classic neighborhoods. More and more folks are learning about the advantages of modifying their homes to meet changing lifestyles, rather than selling and buying another dwelling. The future for Classic Remodeling & Construction, Inc. is very bright. More than 90 percent of the projects in recent years have come from past clients or client referrals. This is a result of the high quality and effective execution of their design-build system. Classic has engaged an independent polling group that reports that 96 percent of Classic’s previous clients would recommend their services to others. That is a real testimonial and Bob Fleming believes it has been achieved because his company has attracted and retained a great team that share his desire for providing high quality projects that are delivered in a seamless manner. Their goal is converting dreams into reality and achieving them is Classic’s passion.

To learn more about Classic Remodeling & Construction, Inc., stop by their new location at 1832 River Road, Johns Island, SC 29455. The phone number is (843) 763-3297, or visit their website at www.classicremodeling.com. ■

