

Charleston Mercury

MAY 24, 2007

THE NEWSPAPER WITH A COSMOPOLITAN ATTITUDE

PRICELESS

PRESORT STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
CHARLESTON SC PERMIT NO 518

www.charlestonmercury.com

Building Dreams With Classic Remodeling



After we ask you to describe your vision and how you live, we return with sketches that, with your approval, turn into plans and budgets.

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED

Classic Remodeling modernized this 1950s home, seamlessly blending it with 21st century home design.

BY PATRA TAYLOR

It is rare when a boy of just six or seven years of age discovers his life's work. But such was the case for Bob Fleming. Spending a portion of his youth in Bethesda, Maryland, living next door to the curator of the Washington National Cathedral provided him the unusual opportunity to explore this magnificent edifice as it was being built — a project that took some 90 years to complete.

"I was most fascinated watching the stone carvers," recalls Mr. Fleming. "Sometimes it took six weeks or more to carve one gargoyle, for example. The carvers told me they could see the gargoyles in the stone before they ever started carving."

At age seven, Mr. Fleming visited historic Williamsburg, Virginia, with his family. It was a trip that cemented his resolve to his career path. "When I saw the buildings in Williamsburg, I knew I wanted to design them and I knew I wanted to build them," he says. "A hundred years ago, someone who both designed and built buildings was called an 'architect.' Today we think of architects as just designers. But

even as a child, I knew I wanted to be involved in both."

Mr. Fleming, who studied both architecture and building science in college, found his niche in the design/build model. When he founded Classic Remodeling in 1989, he combined his two passions to offer his clients an interesting alternative to tackling certain construction projects. "Classic Remodeling is a design/build firm specializing in residential remodeling and restoration," states Mr. Fleming. "That means that rather than clients needing to go out and find an architect and a builder, we have both under one roof."

His is now the largest firm of its kind in the Greater Charleston area; Mr. Fleming believes that combining both skills into one company does away with designer-builder misunderstandings, and delivers a less stressful, more attractive, cost-effective result for local homeowners.

"Oftentimes, our clients know what they want, but they don't know how to get there," continues Mr. Fleming. "They have a vision but don't quite know how to describe it. It's our job to figure out exactly what clients want in their

house and a way to make the house work with the family, how they entertain, how they interact with friends and particularly how it relates to the property it is on."

According to Mr. Fleming, if the property is a waterfront home, Classic Remodeling works to maximize the views of dock, waterway or marsh. Or in a downtown house, they might focus around a center courtyard or traditional garden.

Whatever his clients' dreams, Mr. Fleming says his company's goal is to make those dreams reality. He adds, "After we ask you to describe your vision and how you live, we return with sketches that, with your approval, turn into plans and budgets. You deal with a designer in planning, and a project manager in construction. They deal with everyone else. And we guarantee our craftsmanship and materials for two years."

Remodeling work is very specific. Mr. Fleming says that a new home builder operates "lean and mean," has a project manager or maybe does it himself, and subcontracts



Bob Fleming ponders his next project.

absolutely everything. "The problem with the building business these days is everybody is focused on just their little piece of the pie," he says. "The framers don't think about how the siding is going to tie in; the roofers don't think about how their flashing is going to interrelate with the siding. Everybody is just doing their own little specialty thing, and they're not necessarily pulling it all together in a good way."

"When you get on the residential project, you've got family, kids, pets, existing yard, and all of the furnishings in the house you have to deal with, so it takes a totally different type of person," adds Mr. Fleming. "Whether you're remodeling an outdated kitchen, restoring an historic Charleston single house or adding a wing to your beach home, you deal with one designer and one project manager, so our process also simplifies your life."

Classic Remodeling recently moved into new facilities at 1832 River Road on John's Island. "The facilities have been a dream of mine for the last 20 years," states Mr. Fleming. "I bought this piece of property about five years ago and I love it out here on John's Island. It feels like a whole other world out here. I know it is getting ready to change, but I wanted a building that looked like it had been here for 60 or 80 years. And since I love the Arts and Crafts style, we designed the main building in that exact theme."

Classic Remodeling has been named "Remodeler of the Year" for four consecutive years by the Charleston Homebuilders Association. To help quantify their level of expertise and attention to detail, the company voluntarily subscribes to GuildQuality, an exclusive service that independently performs customer surveying and establishes a public performance rating on set parameters for participating remodelers. The highest level of distinction is given the title of GuildMaster, representing a sustained customer approval ranking of greater than 97 percent. Classic Remodeling is the only GuildMaster of the 41 participating area building professionals specializing exclusively in remodeling.

Bob Fleming proudly serves on the executive committee of the American College of the Building

Arts' board of trustees. He is a vocal advocate who recently headed up the school's Masters of the Building Arts Festival held here in Charleston, noted in an article in these pages in March. The event showcased artisans from across the nation who specialize in construction trades including architectural metal, finish carpentry, timber framing, plaster working, masonry and architectural stone carving.

"The college was established by a visionary who understood that construction artisans were a dying breed," says Mr. Fleming. "It's the goal of the college to train future generations of these artisans, the people who can help preserve our national identity and who construct new buildings that will become part of our future legacy. As a contractor, I understand how important this mission is."

Just as the Washington National Cathedral inspired a young man's dreams, so too will the yet unplanned visions of the talented Mr. Fleming show other generations that graceful structures are good for the soul.

"Everybody is just doing their own little specialty thing, and they're not necessarily pulling it all together in a good way."

