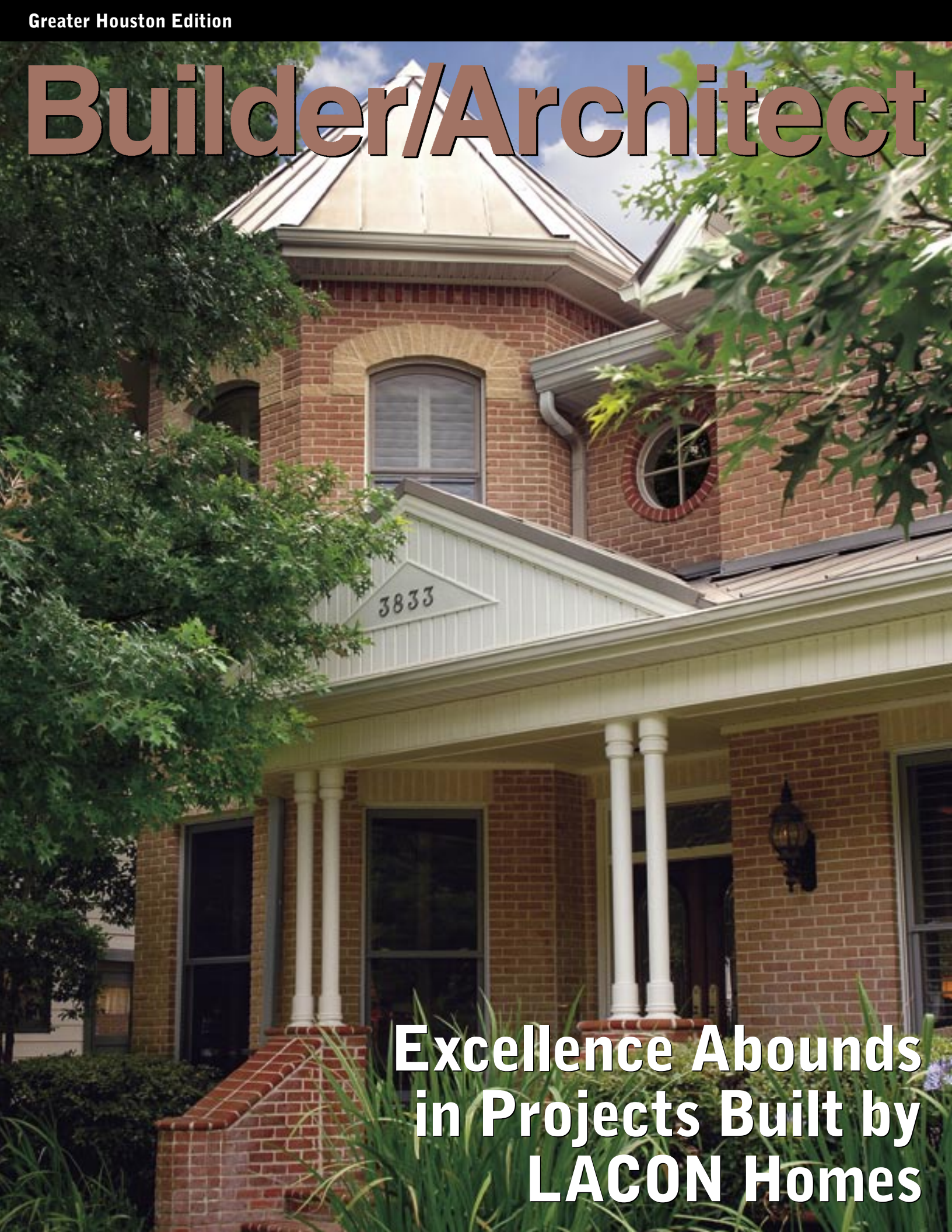


# Builder/Architect



**Excellence Abounds  
in Projects Built by  
LACON Homes**

# Excellence Abounds in Projects Built by LACON Homes

By Ronald Boyce Walker

LACON Homes builds for owners that expect excellence in the design and construction of their custom home.

Like many of his colleagues, LACON Homes founder and President Les Albin was highly successful in the corporate world, but eventually found a more satisfying career path in running his own home building company.

Before he started building homes, Les worked for a major international construction company as head of their internal audit department. After a few years, Les sought a different way to make a

living that would be best for raising a family.

“The international travel associated with doing construction projects and operational reviews lost much of its charm when my wife and I decided to have a family. Building near my home in West University let me spend more time with my family and provided opportunities to build homes that required interesting and rewarding work,” Les said.

## FOCUS ON CUSTOM HOME BUILDING PROJECTS

Established in 1987, LACON now builds homes in such prestigious

**The furniture-grade cherry cabinets of this gourmet kitchen are built such that the grain pattern of the wood is continuous from ceiling to floor. Custom-made short patio doors with disappearing screens serve as windows that open to the pool area for outdoor entertaining. Professional-grade appliances give this kitchen function to match its beauty.**





PHOTO BY RICHARD PAYNE

**Baltic birch cabinets allowed the exposed laminated edges of the doors, drawers and cabinet boxes to be finished as an unusual detail in this contemporary kitchen. Stained concrete floors and custom fabricated stainless sinks and pot racks give this kitchen practical durability and appealing looks.**



Houston-area communities as West University Place, Southside Place, River Oaks, Memorial, Tanglewood, Bellaire, Afton Oaks, Braes Heights, Southampton and Southgate.

Les holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and an MBA. This distinct educational background is an asset for understanding the fine details of home construction and operating a building company proficiently.

"My degrees in mechanical engineering and business, combined with years of engineering and construction experience, gave me a solid background for what I do today; but as with any new job, there was a lot to learn," Les said.

LACON started as a "spec" home-building company 20 years ago, but soon moved to all contract construction of custom homes and high-end remodeling where the emphasis is on quality rather than lowest price.

"I started building speculative homes, but quickly moved to all contract work. My last 'spec' was built in 1991, but I never sold it. My wife liked the house so much that we moved in and it is the home where we live today," Les said.

LACON has built five homes on the block where Les and his family live. The very first home he ever built is next door to theirs.

"As a builder you have to be dedicated to doing things right to live amongst your work," he said.

After establishing LACON Homes, Les found a challenge in getting contractors who met his high standards.

"The biggest challenge was finding good subcontractors and learning what distinguished really good work from that which will just pass city inspections," Les said.

"Most people have very little appreciation of how complex residential construction can be or what it takes to do the job in such a way that people who live in the home will enjoy it for years to come," he said.

Through such contacts as the chief building official of West University Place, Les was able to find right architects, engineers and subcontractors.

**The better the plans, the easier it will be for the construction team to understand what you want the final product to look like and the easier it will be to develop an accurate budget for the job.**

— Les Albin, President, LACON Homes

“Since then I have spent a lot of time working with various architects and craftsmen to develop my knowledge and understanding of what it takes to do this job well,” Les said.

“I have looked for projects that let me do things that expanded my knowledge of what is possible and how things can be done differently,” he said.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO HOME DESIGN

Les has done some things in his work that were as eye-popping as they were innovative.

“On one of my single-family residence projects in the Memorial area, the neighbors thought I was building a high-rise condominium when we brought a 90-foot crane on site to drill 60-foot piers. The retaining walls we built to allow us to do the full basement on the job were done with the same technique that the highway contractor used to do the walls on the Hwy. 59 expansion near downtown Houston. The subcontractor who did the work usually does grain elevator foundations in Kansas and Nebraska,” Les explained.

“On another job we brought in a contractor from Georgia to do a crushed oyster-shell stucco finish. The oyster shell had to come from Florida since EPA regulations made it illegal to get shell from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi or Alabama,” he said.

LACON’s contractors share his passion for taking on challenging professional endeavors.

“Some of my subs have gone to Cape Cod and San Diego to do work for my Houston clients who have homes elsewhere. One sub even went to Amsterdam to finish the floors of a yacht for a client,” Les said.

Les likes to thoroughly plan his building projects.

“The better the plans, the easier it will be for the construction team to understand what you want the final product to look like and the easier it will be to develop an accurate budget for the job,” Les said.

## HOMEOWNER PLAYS IMPORTANT ROLE

“The owner, builder and architect are the primary members of the project team. All three need to work together in constructive, cooperative manner to make a successful project. All will do their best. As humans, all will have a few things they will want to

**I**f you are going to be a builder, do it because it is something you really enjoy.

change, but working together will make the final solutions satisfying. An experienced builder can lead the client through the process of construction and related decisions incorporating owner decisions as the project develops,” Les said.

The path to success in home building takes hard work and honesty, Les said.

“If you are going to be a builder, do it because it is something you really enjoy. It is a lot of hard work that you will be doing for a long

**Artistic application of multiple layers of translucent stains and paints gave the walls of this powder room a depth and warmth not available with other finishes. The curved cabinet doors are a feature not all trim carpenters can build.**



PHOTO BY PATRICK BERTOLINO PHOTOGRAPHER



The birdseye maple panels in this living room are sequentially numbered to assure a perfect match from panel to panel. Doors opening to the courtyard on one side and the pool on the other give the room beautiful lighting during the day while carefully placed computer-controlled lighting does the same at night.

time. There are certainly easier ways to make a living. It takes a real self-starter with good interpersonal skills, patience and perseverance to become a good contract builder in residential work.

“Honesty is your most valuable asset. What goes around comes around, and a reputation for good work and honesty is what you need to sustain a residential contracting business,” Les said.

## KEEPING UP WITH NEW TRENDS

The home building industry continually changes and LACON Homes keeps up with new trends in home building.

“Communications technology is the most important change since I started building. Cell phones, fax machines and the Internet have made huge differences in how work is done. Communications are much easier and more efficient than at any time in the past. This lets builders be much more efficient and productive than was possible before,” Les said.

“Green’ building is bound to become more important as energy prices climb and greater demands are placed on available resources. Constructing homes that use resources efficiently will become increasingly important. As an engineer I really appreciate things that contribute to better efficiency.

“Eventually we may see people becoming more interested in designs which use the space efficiently. Right now the focus is just on how many square feet of living space are in a home, but more sophisticated owners are starting to realize that you don’t have to build as much space if you design and build space that can be used well,” Les said.

In the future, municipalities should enforce stricter building codes to improve quality and enhance and preserve their tax base, Les said.

In addition to new construction, LACON Homes does remodeling work. The company prefers to focus on quality and do a limited number of projects each year. This level of quality is demonstrated in the use of building materials and construction techniques.

“Many of the construction details I use routinely are designed to minimize maintenance and repairs on the home. Use of rot-resistant

**M**any of the construction details I use routinely are designed to minimize maintenance and repairs on the home.



PHOTO BY PATRICK BERTOLINO PHOTOGRAPHER

**Twenty years ago, Les left the corporate world to enjoy a career in the more craftsmanship-oriented environment of high-end residential construction. His engineering and business degrees, international construction experience and certification as an internal auditor give him an excellent background for working with architects and clients who appreciate the best in home building. His down-to-earth, even-tempered approach provides excellent leadership to a team of some of Houston’s best craftsmen. Les enjoys what he does and works to be sure that everyone who participates in a project finds it a rewarding experience.**

and corrosion-resistant materials in areas that might be subject to moisture at some time in the future is something I do on every home that can prevent expensive repairs if something unforeseen occurs.

“I work with plumbers to route drain pipes away from living areas and with insulators to muffle noises. These details take a bit more supervisory time, but it makes living in the home more enjoyable,” Les said.

Les is active in his community. He has been a member of the West University Building Standards Commission and the West University Zoning and Planning Commission for more than 10 years.

Outside of his professional work, he is a sailing and sports car enthusiast. Les is an active member of Lotus Owners of South Texas.

To contact LACON Homes, call (713) 668-2460 or e-mail [laconhomes@aol.com](mailto:laconhomes@aol.com) or visit [www.laconhouston.com](http://www.laconhouston.com). ■