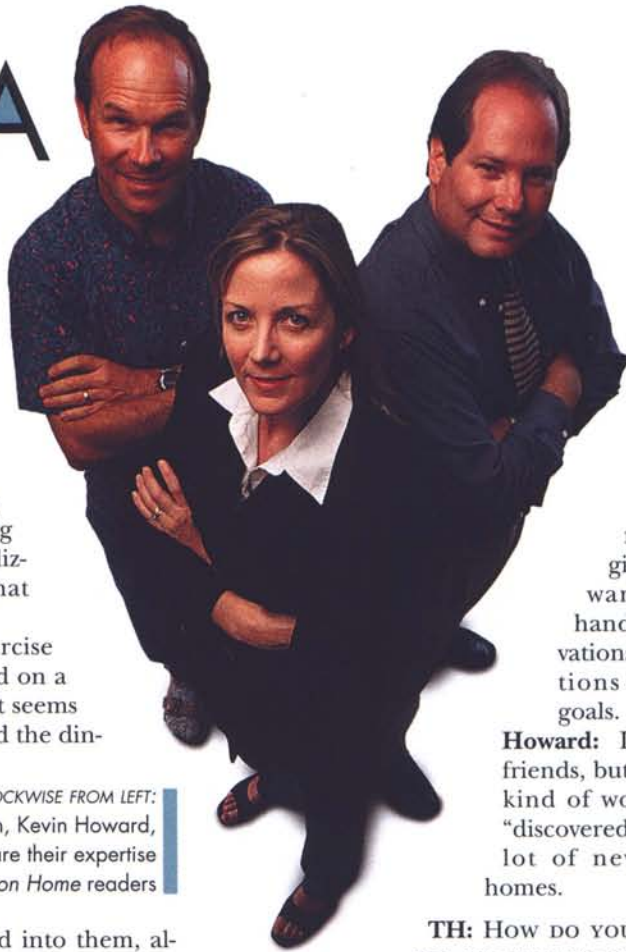


Architect Q&A



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Architects Steve Bohn, Kevin Howard,
and Alexandra Hayes share their expertise
with *Tucson Home* readers

TH: WHAT'S POPULAR RIGHT NOW IN DESERT ARCHITECTURE?

Bohn: There's a growing awareness and appreciation of alternative building materials such as straw bale, alternative masonry such as EnerGrid, structural insulated panels, rammed earth, etc. So there seems to be a trend toward awareness of the desert environment and a respect for it. It's not an overwhelming force, but more and more architects are responding to the environment. Not dominating, but utilizing it, with solar, water harvesting and what have you.

Hayes: Some popular features include exercise rooms and butler's pantries. And I've worked on a number of fully automated "smart houses." It seems that higher-end homes are getting larger, and the dining room is gaining popularity again in place of the great room (which combines living and dining areas). I see

more kitchens with living areas incorporated into them, almost like a sitting area or a smaller family room, and the living room is used more for entertaining or larger parties. I'm also seeing a renewed interest in wood floors rather than colored concrete or tile. In fact, I'm seeing a lot of custom cabinetry, wainscoting—a lot of detailed woodwork in general.

Howard: It depends on how you define popular. In our practice I look for transcendent qualities, not trends. I think that if we define popularity in terms of what my clients are looking for it would be homes that blend and work with the desert. This is a trend I have been fighting for, so when clients look for those qualities it's gratifying.

TH: HOW DO YOU APPROACH A REMODEL?

Bohn: There are a lot of factors, but most important is budget. And clients need to realize that their investment is probably not going to be recouped immediately. A fix-up house with a facelift and system upgrades may be profitable right away, but generally, a full-blown remodel with big ideas involved is not going to reap benefits in terms of an immediate investment return. Most of my clients come to me after they've shopped around at some of the new developments that have great amenities but maybe the yard isn't big enough and the home doesn't have any soul. They don't feel right. Or they like their current location or neighborhood and want to invest in it. The important thing is to make their environment comfortable and functional while visually upgrading. Most clients want the remodel to blend with the existing home.

Hayes: I used to do remodels quite often, but now my work is focused primarily on designing custom homes. When I do a remodel I meet my clients and find out what their needs and desires are. If the existing house plans are not available,

we measure and prepare plans to use as a base when designing.

I then try to define a "vocabulary" that exists in the house.

For example, if the house has cove ceilings or wood trim, we might retain that feature. I also ask my clients to prepare a "wish list" along with clippings from magazines that give a feel for what they want. Then I prepare hand-drawn plans and elevations illustrating several options for achieving their goals.

Howard: I will do a remodel for friends, but we don't seek out that kind of work. Tucson has been "discovered," so we are building a lot of new, high-end custom homes.

TH: HOW DO YOU MONITOR THE BUILDING PROCESS TO MAKE SURE THE BUILDER IS CONSTRUCTING ACCORDING TO THE PLAN?

Bohn: I insist on frequent visits with both new construction and remodels. I call it "construction observation." I visit the site at regular intervals as needed to monitor the construction and ensure that the intent of the plans is being followed properly. The architect/builder relationship is very important. I have an excellent relationship with all the builders I work with. There are always unforeseen situations, and if you can deal with them in a diplomatic manner, you're in good shape. An architect's presence has a lot to do with a builder staying on top of things. On almost every project I work on, the owner, builder, and I meet on a regular basis. We share updates on schedules, you see things that need attention, and that way you can deal with them. The owner is involved in the progress and is gratified by it.

Hayes: For larger, more complicated homes, I contract another meticulous architect to join our team to do construction administration and prepare site-visit reports. For the less complicated projects I am on hand to answer the builder's questions, if any, during construction. How often I visit the job site also depends on the contract and varies greatly from job to job.

Howard: We perform construction administration to protect the homeowner's interest, making sure that the home is built according to the intent of the working drawings. We work *with* the builder to make things run as smoothly as possible. I work hard to have a good rapport and relationship with builders. Construction administration involves a lot of site visits. And because it's what I enjoy, I can't keep away from the building site.


TH: HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT MATCHING A BUILDING TO ITS SITE?

Bohn: There are four critical aspects to consider:

- What views do you have? Where will your future neighbors build? Where are your existing neighbors? You are looking at their position and responding to it.
- Locate the building on the site so it complements but does not dominate it. I don't want a home to look like a big, white monument to myself. It should look like it belongs there. Contrast can be exciting, but dominance can be ugly.
- Solar orientation, especially in Arizona, is important with respect to overhangs and screening, which also must work with the views. Views are often to the north, but sunsets are west, and a western sun is the most difficult sun to screen.
- Consider the natural features of the site that you want the building to relate to or that you want to respect, such as rock outcroppings, washes, floodplains, and natural vegetation that you may want to retain. Oftentimes the client will ask me to go look at a site before they purchase it. An architect can help the clients decide which lot would best suit their ideas, views (current and future), and budget.

Hayes: I consider myself a practitioner of site-sensitive architecture. The site is as important as a client's program or list of requirements. To begin any new project we study the site for solar, prevailing winds, drainage, views, significant plants, etc., and prepare a diagrammatic site-study drawing. I also do freehand drawings. I think people go to the computer

too quickly. I like sketching, as it allows for a lot of flexibility, which in turn allows the project to progress in a more artful way. As the design progresses we build a model and use the computer to produce 3-D renderings that depict how the house is integrated into the site.

Howard: Matching a home to its site is the crux of what I do. That's my main goal, to match to the site and to the client's lifestyle. Most of my initial client meetings are at the site rather than my office. We walk the lot and I try to find out what their favorite views are—city? mountains? both? It's called site adaptation. We then do a complete topographic survey, including trees, saguaros, rock outcroppings, and other natural features. After I understand the clients' program—what they want to accomplish—and their lifestyle, I then look at what the site tells me. Those things establish my parameters, and once you factor all those things in, the design really comes together. When all is said and done and the residence looks like it belongs on that site and no one can imagine it anywhere else but right there, then we've done our job. 

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Have a question of your own? Please send to Tucson Home Editor, Madden Publishing, 2730 E. Broadway Blvd., Ste. 250, Tucson, AZ 85716 or e-mail mcmahon@maddenpublishing.com. We may not answer all questions received, nor will we return materials submitted.