

People in House*Home

TONY STEFAN ON DESIGN/BUILD REMODELING

JOHN KIERNAN CONSTRUCTION'S IN-HOUSE DESIGNER DISHES ON DESIGN/BUILD, GUT JOBS AND LECORBUSIER. BY BRITTA ALEXANDER. PHOTOS BY BARRY KLIPP.

IF YOUR IDEA OF A REMODELER'S BUSINESS TOOLS IS A BUCKET OF NAILS, A RUSTY HAMMER AND A SIX-PACK OF SCHLITZ, THINK AGAIN. The home remodeling industry hit \$149.5 billion last year, and today's remodelers are more sophisticated than ever. They track projects with high-end computer software, transform homes using state-of-the-art equipment and even employ their own in-house architects and designers. They're called design/build remodeling firms, and like the name suggests, they not only build your addition or remodel, they design it, too.

Bradenton-based John Kiernan Construction is one such design/build firm, and was recently ranked among the top 50 remodelers in the country by *Remodeling Magazine*. We spoke with Kiernan's in-house designer Tony Stefan about this growing trend.

What is your role as the in-house designer for a design/build firm? As a construction company's in-house designer, I envision a building's design as well as its construction. I'm with the clients from the beginning and see the project through the end. I manage problems and unexpected changes along the way. I look at the work that's happening and provide guidance to the tradespeople. I like being closer to the work. It's more fun, more satisfying.

How does your role differ from an architect who works at an architect firm? An architect firm will give plans to a client and the client takes the plans to contractors to get bids. [Whereas in design/build, the plans are executed in-house.] When I worked at an architect firm, if I wanted to see the job I designed, I'd have to drive by. At night.

When should a homeowner choose design/build instead of an architect firm? Integrated design and construction is important. If you're going to remodel your house and want to see it done close to your budget, you have to go with a remodeling firm. It's a totally different ball of wax from new construction. The drawings we get from architects blow the budget every time. Sometimes it's even double. Remodeling firms know what remodeling costs. Then again, if you've got a one-of-a-kind, jewel box kind of house, you want to hire an architect as artist.

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What are some examples of design/build projects in town? Lakewood Ranch was a design/build. It helps to fast track a project.

Favorite style of house to work on? I don't really have a preference, although I would love to do a Carl Abbott or Sarasota School of Architecture, but those projects usually go to specialists. Most of the houses I work on were built in the last 20 years.

Form over function? "Form" is subjective, but I assume by "form" you mean aesthetics. I'd have to go with function; practical. The biggest complaints from homeowners are about functionality.

When is it a gut job and when do you build around an existing structure? If a home requires a significant amount of work, it's sometimes better to sell and buy something bigger. For example, if a client paid \$400,000 for their house and their remodel is going to cost \$300,000, sometimes we'll tell the client to look for a \$700,000 house and see if they still want to remodel. But people have all kinds of reasons for wanting to stay. Geographic reasons, personal reasons.

Which do you enjoy more: renovating an old house or building a big new one from scratch? I'd say renovations every time. There are more challenges when you're working with the constraints of the existing condition. You have to problem solve and exercise ingenuity. Plus it's recycling; investing in an existing infrastructure.

What are your favorite architect-specific words? Ineffable. It describes the indescribable. It's visceral and intuitive, the potential for architecture to achieve. Also, LeCorbusier. He's a seminal modernist French architect. I studied him in India for my master's thesis.

What percentage of being an architect is creativity vs. math? Math is a tool of creativity.

How do Florida's hurricanes affect design? Code requires sheer walls on every corner. So you can't put windows or doors in corners, which can sometimes be a limitation. Also, budget issues can limit scope of work. It's more expensive to build here because structures have to be stronger. ☐

