

## Vision, Experience and Craftsmanship

Bryan Edwards shares the keys to working with a builder or home remodeler

**T**hinking of building a home or making some serious changes to your current one? Bryan Edwards of Hughes Edwards Builders in Sumner County recently took the time to speak with us about his company's latest project and to share some thoughts with curious homeowners about what to look for in a builder or remodeler when they're ready to hire. He also share with us a few of the hottest trends in high-end construction, to give readers an idea of what's going on out there as people build or add on to their homes.

By Stacie Standifer

**Can you give us a bit of background on Hughes Edwards—how it started, who's involved, and the mission, the basics of the company?** I'm a principal partner of Hughes-Edwards Builders, Inc., a family-owned and -operated construction company in Sumner County. What started under the sole proprietorship of Gene Hughes has expanded to include several family members. We're a design-and-build residential custom home-building and remodeling firm. This year, we're putting our expertise to work on the Junior League of Gallatin's Holiday Showhouse, which opens to the public in November. This project directly benefits the community and it's located in Fairvue Plantation, one of Middle Tennessee's most exclusive developments.

**What's the vision of your building company and how do you keep operations running smoothly day to day?** Our primary demographic is the high-end sector. Our tag line is vision, experience and craftsmanship. We employ a controller, office manager, project manager and two field superintendents, in addition to the family members. All of our tradespersons are independent subcontractors, and some have been with us for more than 20 years.

**What are your primary concentrations in the building industry?** Our primary concentration is high-end design and construction of residential custom homes and residential remodeling and additions.

**When someone is looking to build a custom home, what advice can you offer on selecting the right builder?** During the initial phase of



Photo by Angela M. Bertrand

builder selection, the homeowner needs to determine the following: What's the builder's experience level in general and in building the customer's specific type of project in particular? What type of subcontractors does the chosen builder utilize? How much creativity and vision does the builder possess? This question is important because you'll probably have some issues along the way, and how your builder handles these concerns makes a huge difference in your ultimate satisfaction with a home. You want your builder to actively look for ways to enhance and positively modify with your approval.

How well can the builder communicate with the customer? Communication is crucial in building a custom home in order to satisfy everyone.

How involved will the builder be in the construction process? Homeowners need to select a builder they trust, respect and feel has their best interest as a top priority. You'll be spending a great deal of time together, so you need to like your builder. If price is the only consideration, you don't need to build a custom home—instead you need to buy existing or production.

**Are there certain types of projects/references that potential homeowners should ask for from a builder?** Custom home clients need to tour the builder's completed and in-process projects. This gives them a greater feel for the way the job site will be run during their construction, the quality of the construction and the quality of the finishes. A walk-through also provides a sense of how the completed homes feel.

Additionally, potential clients should ask for the names and numbers of past clients who have gone through the construction experience with the builder.

**How important is the personality of the builder and the relationship between builder and owner when making your selection?** In the custom-building world, the builder and client should work together when making selections. The relationship between builder and client is of the utmost importance, as they'll be spending a great deal of time together. The builder needs to guide and assist the client along the whole process. Builders take for granted the plethora of decisions necessary during the life of the project and need to be sensitive to the fact this may be the client's first custom home experience. The builder should be on call for the client during the various selections, to make sure clients are both comfortable and satisfied with the choices.

**Do certain custom builders specialize in particular areas? Do you have certain areas that you prefer building in?** Typically contractors will build in geographic areas they can effectively and efficiently service. In other words—how far will their labor pool travel to build a house? Other builders may be tied down to particular developments. Hughes-Edwards Builders builds custom homes all over the Middle Tennessee market. We presently build in Sumner, Davidson and Wilson Counties.

**You also do some remodeling—how does that**

**differ in pricing from new construction? Is this trend becoming more popular?** Remodeling involves transforming or altering an existing structure. The builder is doing double the work—tearing down or out, and then rebuilding. Examples of things to consider include: what's behind the sheetrock that will have to be relocated—plumbing, electrical and heat and air, for example? How do we tie the addition into the existing roofline? Will we be eliminating any load-bearing walls? Can we salvage existing material and reuse it? And what finishes need to be demolished to make way for the new materials? That's just to name a few.

Remodeling is a trend that's becoming popular for a number of reasons. Homeowners can remodel for less money than they'd spend to build a new home or buy an existing one. Also, sellers can't always get the asking price they need out of a current home so they decide to stay put and renovate. When the real estate market gets soft, interest rates go up and remodeling picks up. And also, remodeling provides the living spaces you want without having to build a whole new home.

**What are some of the most popular trends right now in building, the things clients are asking for?** Outdoor living spaces are in high demand. So are architectural features such as groin vaults, coffered ceilings, barreled ceilings, and beams in vaulted rooms. Buyers like spacious closets with custom-built cabinetry. Gourmet kitchens with stainless steel appliances continue to be desirable.

People want homes to fit their lifestyles—they want everything more open for ease in entertaining and they also like to comfortably transition from room to room efficiently and effectively. Multi-purpose entertainment rooms as opposed to dedicated theater rooms and whole-house audio or low-volt components keep gaining popularity, too.

Master suites have now become personal retreats for the homeowners. They're little havens people use to rejuvenate themselves—and in the suites, TV areas or sitting/reading niches are a big trend.

**How important is incorporating new technology into today's homes?** We like to make sure the technology is proven before recommending it to our clients, so I'd say incorporating proven new technology is very important. The best example of this is the low-voltage or smart-house technology which allows people to enhance their living experience—whole-house audio, automated lighting, outdoor landscape lighting, cameras on the interior and exterior of the house and hooking the security system, lighting and heat and air system to the internet in order to monitor the house while you're away. We use tankless continuous hot water heaters in our homes, which pay for themselves in a two- to three-year period. All of these enhance appraisal and resale value. Additionally, we use engineered flooring systems and engineered plywood.

**When it comes to pricing a custom job, is it better for individuals to work out a fee for the builder or is a percentage-base more desirable? Or does it depend on the job or situation? Please explain.** It depends on the job or situation. In our market, everything is cost-plus. Hughes-Edwards is flexible and will work either way, that's why we're a custom builder. For a fixed-fee situation to be successful, you need to have a tightly nailed-down blueprint and also the building and finishing material determined before the contract is signed, in order to have the most accurate project-cost projection. Very little needs to be subject to change.

**What are some things that owners working with a custom builder or remodeler can do to make a project go smoothly?** Make the required selections and/or decisions by the timelines established by the contractor. Allow the builder to build the house. Put your requests or issues in writing. Don't discuss changes or issues with the subcontractors, everything needs to go through the builder. Again, communication is vital.

**Are there things that can be done ahead of time to make pricing and budget easier to plan?** Make the following selections from vendors before the project is priced: brick and stone veneers, windows and doors, plumbing, lighting, cabinets and countertops, appliances, tile, carpet, hardwood floors and landscaping plan.

**Describe some building challenges owners need to be aware of before planning to invest in such a project.** The amount of lot-prep necessary to get the house out of the ground and the availability of labor during the construction project are important issues. Be prepared for weather conditions that can delay the project. The availability of certain building materials and material pricing increases after construction has begun can become concerns. Then there are change orders that extend the project completion date as well as the cost of the project—you should always be aware that midstream changes you make will often alter time and expense.

**You're building Sumner County's first show-house for charity this year. Can you tell us a bit about some of the unique features and materials that will be highlighted in the home?** We're honored to build a European-inspired country French home that uses a combination of natural stone, mortar rub and cedar shingles on the exterior. We'll have great architectural features including a groin vault, several barrel ceilings, arched casement openings, beams in vaulted ceilings and coffered ceilings. We're using the DTV custom shower system by Kohler in the master bath—we jokingly call it the human car wash. Noritz is providing three tankless, continuous hot water heaters. We'll have a big-boy gaming room which has become quite popular in the last couple of years. Sure to be popular is the breakfast bar in the master bath equipped with a built-in coffee-maker recessed into the wall, so you can enjoy your java straight from the shower.



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