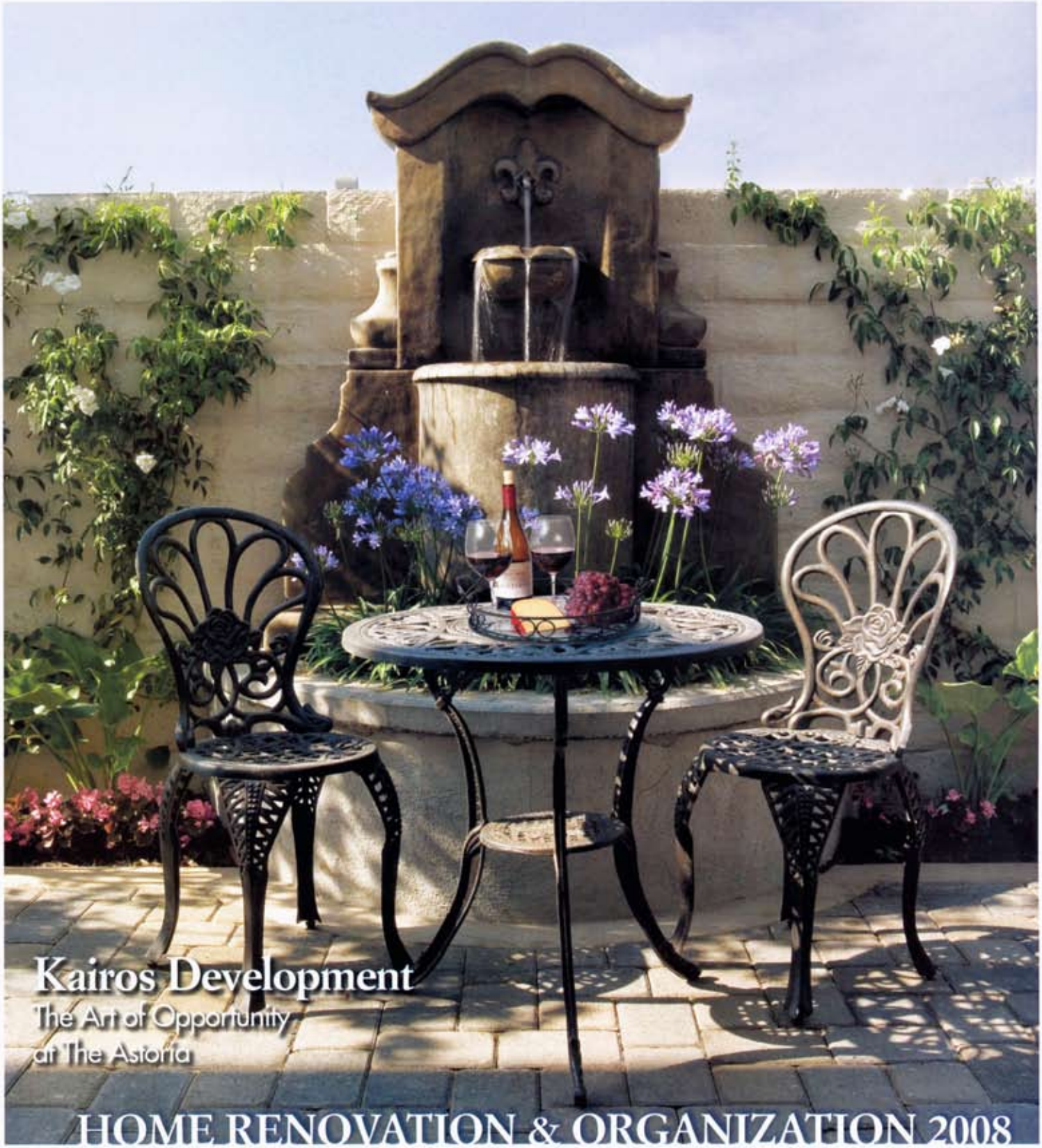
Today's CUSTOM HOME

ATLANTA'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUILDING OR REMODELING YOUR CUSTOM HOME • JUNE/JULY 2008



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HOME RENOVATION & ORGANIZATION 2008

Renovations require close teamwork among all professionals. Each team member has a specialized area of expertise, and by sharing and combining skill sets, the team and the client will receive a better final product.

Architects serve as advocates for homeowners during renovation projects, helping convey the client's vision to the contractor and other professionals involved, such as Harrison Design Associates did in this striking outdoor living area renovation.

A GUIDING HAND

Architects Ease Clients Through Renovations

By William (Bill) Harrison, AIA, and Dawn Bennett, AIA
Photography courtesy of Jim Bartsch, John Umberger and Harrison Design Associates

Remodeling is probably the most rewarding yet occasionally frustrating project you can undertake, because whenever you begin to look behind a home's walls, you will always uncover surprises. It also tends to be an emotional process, since homeowners often opt to live on the front lines throughout a project.

For those reasons and a host of others, it's essential to involve an architect in your project. First, architects are trained to view homes differently. A homeowner, for example, may know they want a more open kitchen. An architect will see the unused attic space above their existing kitchen and suggest using it to add more volume to the room. Architects also bring a wealth of experience to your project. Since they have seen and dealt with renovations before, they can guide you through the excitement and pitfalls. Even if they encounter surprises that could not be foreseen, architects have the expertise to handle those unexpected twists quickly in a rational manner that minimizes upheavals.

We view architects as advocates for homeowners, helping convey the client's vision to the contractor. On a practical level, the more detailed the drawings and specifications you give to your contractor, the closer the end result will be to your vision. Your architect's detailed documentation aids the contractor in preparing a more accurate budget before the project commences, thereby keeping the entire team informed of the cost of work. Renovations, above all other types of construction, require close teamwork among all professionals. Each team member has a specialized area of expertise, and by sharing and combining skill sets, the team and ultimately the client will receive a better final product. ►

An architect can come up with creative solutions to renovation dilemmas, "finding" space in other areas as they did in this dramatic kitchen transformation.

JOHN UMBERGER

It is in educating clients and handling complex projects where an architect shines. A good architect will help clients understand both the permitting process and the structural and aesthetic ramifications of their decisions. For example, it may seem simple to move a bedroom wall 2' to gain space, yet doing so may bring about structural or utility changes that require a slew of permits and add months to the project. An architect can come up with creative solutions that "find" space in other areas that are easier to access. Oftentimes, clients have several projects in mind, yet can't do everything at once. That's where an architect can help them prioritize and then design project phases in such a way that homeowners can easily go back and tackle the rest later. ►

HARRISON DESIGN ASSOCIATES

It is in educating clients and handling complex projects, such as this extensive whole house renovation, where an architect shines. A good architect will help clients understand both the permitting process and the structural and aesthetic ramifications of their decisions.

Finally, an architect is also an advocate for you when you face review boards, whether it's a neighborhood association or a historical review board. One recent renovation of a historic home in Druid Hills required two years to obtain all the necessary approvals. The clients had not anticipated such a lengthy process, and said that had we not been there to spearhead it, they would simply have given up their dreams. Although reviews are not always that intense, having an architect who can present your plans and illustrate to a board that your project meets their requirements gives you an advantage in moving through the initial stages of the renovation process. When construction begins, having an architect's sign out front also means that they field the phone calls from your neighbors if a crew shows up at 7:58 a.m. on Saturday with power tools blazing. The importance of insulating clients from these everyday inconveniences can not be overstated.

Renovations are wonderful undertakings; however, homeowners need to go into them with an understanding of the flexibility they require. Even the best laid plans are only 90 percent accurate, because you simply never know what you will find when you tear down walls. When your renovation uncovers a challenge, you can trust that the professionals you have hired will find cost-effective solutions that maintain the integrity and vision of your project.

Dawn Bennett, AIA, has a master's degree in Architecture from Washington University and spent eight years in a commercial architectural firm before becoming Harrison Design Associates' first female Project Architect. She manages a studio of five professionals who focus primarily on high-end residential architecture and historic renovations. Harrison Design Associates includes a team of more than 85 architects and designers who believe the handcrafted custom home is an individual work of art. The award-winning firm offers site planning, design, interior design, landscape architecture and construction administration and management. For more information, call (404) 365-7760 or visit HarrisonDesignAssociates.com.