

# Today's CUSTOM HOME

ATLANTA'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUILDING OR REMODELING YOUR CUSTOM HOME • OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2007



*On the cover*

## **J Lance Properties**

Rebuilding the Past

## **Designed for Today**

Frank Betz Associates, Inc.

Capture Buyers' Imaginations

## **It is Easy Being Green**

The Hoots Group Helps Clients

Make Wise Choices



# Under Review

## ARBs Offer Essential Protection

By John Albanese, AIA • Photography by John Umberger



Architectural Review Boards are put in place to ensure that homes within a community are appropriate to the overall style of the neighborhood and to their individual architectural styles. They protect homeowners' investments in their future neighborhoods.

“...future homeowners are making a substantial investment. We (ARBs) are protecting that investment by ensuring that an inappropriate structure will not be erected next door.”

All too often, the public has misconceptions about Architectural Review Boards (ARBs). The image of a panel of stern reviewers marking plans in red ink and telling people they cannot build the home they really want is far from the truth.

In reality, an ARB generally consists of a single, registered architect who is appointed to review plans in the preliminary and final stages. In some cases, there will also be a landscape architect on the ARB. Our goals are simple: we are there to help the subdivision sell lots, the builders sell homes, and homeowners get what they want. After all, future homeowners are making a substantial investment. We are protecting that investment by ensuring that an inappropriate structure will not be erected next door. By taking a team approach with the builder and homeowner, we are able to develop solutions that are beneficial to everyone.

When your builder brings in a plan, we have a relaxed and informal consultation. We consider aspects such as where and how the home is positioned on the lot, and how it relates to the homes next to it and down the street. We make sure the style of the home is consistent with the guidelines and fits within the context of the neighborhood.

We also make certain that each home is unique. Oftentimes, a builder has been constructing a particular spec home for years. They may want to build it again, because it has been a strong seller in the past and they are familiar with its costs, or because a client has requested it. To keep from being repetitive, we offer suggestions on elements the builder could add or change to make the home unique. ▶




Architectural Review Boards work as a team with builders, developers and homeowners to ensure that each home features unique elements that set it apart from homes within the neighborhood and in other communities.

We then look at the details of the home to ensure that aspects like its massing and proportion are correct. A drawing, for example, might show an exterior bump with stone veneer on the front façade only. The proper way to do that is to end materials on an inside corner, which gives the impression that the entire mass is the same material. Yet the builder might resist the added expense of running material down the sides to the nearest inside corner. We may recommend something as simple as creating a jog in the side elevation to shorten that distance, thus reducing the cost. At the other extreme, some builders want to add heavy soffit and cornice to make a home look more stately. Oftentimes, less is more; a simple cornice and rake detail is more in keeping with the overall architectural style. In that case, we are saving them money on materials and helping them build a more attractive home.

Occasionally, homeowners will want to include design elements that are not appropriate. They may see decorative brackets on another home and want to add them. If they are not consistent with their home's architectural style, we offer suggestions for similar elements that would achieve the same effect.

It is very rare that we tell someone they simply cannot do something. Most homeowners are savvy and go into a neighborhood with a good idea of what can be built. Most subdivisions provide a pattern book, which describes appropriate home styles. If they are not certain whether the type of home they want is permitted, I encourage them to present it to the ARB as a conceptual. They can bring in floor plans or even a photo of a similar home to see if what they want is appropriate.

Ultimately, it is our job as an ARB to protect homeowners. They are investing in their dream home, and they do not want their neighbors building a monstrosity or a monument to themselves. There is no accounting for tastes, and in many neighborhoods without ARBs, you just have to hope that your neighbors have some. 

*John Albanese is a Project Architect who has been with Harrison Design Associates for over eight years. He now runs a studio of seven designers and has served on many Architectural Review Boards. Today, the company includes a team of more than 75 architects and designers who believe the handcrafted custom home is an individual work of art. The award-winning firm offers site planning, design, architectural interior design, and construction administration and management. Call (404) 365-7760 or visit [HarrisonDesignAssociates.com](http://HarrisonDesignAssociates.com) for more information.*