

EAST COAST HOME+DESIGN

*THE
OUTDOOR
ISSUE*



Matthew Kolk and Sam Gault

2015 Third Annual Builders + Architects Roundtable Discussion

Buying? Building? Renovating? Read on.

An Alchemical Mix of the Wit & Wisdom of Builders & Architects

Story by Susan Heller | Photography by Neil Landino



Tony Savino

Alchemy is the science-art best known by its medieval incarnation where practitioners focused on the transmutation of elements such as turning base metals into gold. Not unlike the process whereby builders and architects take the science of engineering, combine it with the basic elements of building materials, add in an astonishing array of client needs, and, through their creative vision, expertise and artistry, make a house into a home.

So which of the current trends are mere flavor-of-the-month PR spins

and which will provide real-world value to clients? How do you decide if your new space needs to be 3,000, 13,000 or 30,000 square feet? What about Special Purpose Rooms? Does the exterior of a house define the design of the interior space?

One answer to all of the above, is to convene a meeting of the area's top architects and builders, ask the questions and watch the fireworks. For the third year in a row, East Coast Home + Design partnered with Gault Stone & Energy to explore relevant questions for homeowners and professionals in the home design and construction industry.



Dinyar Wadia

There is much to be learned when top-tier talent start discussing, disagreeing, articulating and expressing their passionately-held views about the work they do. Graciously hosted by Sam Gault at his Westport, CT Showroom, the Roundtable was once again moderated by the imperturbable Editor-in-Chief of East Coast Home + Design, Matt Kolk.

WE BEGIN WITH QUESTION 1

Matt Kolk: *My first question is actually inspired by a conversation I had with Chuck Hilton. It appears that home exteriors--from contemporary to Georgian--are staying fairly consistent, but the interiors are getting a lot cleaner, sleeker, more pared down. How do your current projects reflect this trend and what's driving it?*

The Great Dining Debate:

Dinyar Wadia: Two years ago we were designing a shingle-style house in New Haven county and my client summed it up best by saying, "I don't want to live in my grandmother's house." That set the whole tone for our office. Since then, most of the interiors we're designing are transitional or even contemporary, and most of the apartments we are doing in New York city are contemporary. The furniture is cleaner, crisper, even in a very traditional house in Fairfield County, that seems to be the focus.

Susan Ailsberg: I would add two things to that, one is that technology has changed things. Everybody has embraced technology, years ago people were hiding televisions, now it's the center piece; it's over the fireplace, it's over the mantel. Additionally, years ago when you did a big house there was a lot of help to service it, life was more formal. People have a more informal lifestyle. Since the crash, understated is chic.

Dinyar Wadia: We are designing houses now without dining rooms without living rooms, so it's just a great room now. Dining, eating, living space, breakfast space. No more formal dining rooms.

Jonathan Wagner: I don't know if I agree with that. I've done a fair amount of contemporary houses and I do believe people want a formal dining room, certainly the living room has become secondary, perhaps that function has been replaced by a library, but a separate adult space where adults can retreat and watch TV or read quietly is important.

Dinyar Wadia: I have a beautiful dining room, I've lived in the house for fifteen years and I've probably used it five times.

Susan Ailsberg: I disagree, I think people want a little ceremony from time to time, and some clients want another function in their dining room; that's a place where kids do projects or kids are being tutored, that kind of thing, but there's also a thing about retreating, having a meal in a special space.

Ed Parker: They want a dining room to be more flexible too, they



Ross Tiefenthaler, Steven Mueller and Howard Lathrop

Exteriors, from contemporary to Georgian, are staying fairly consistent, but the interiors are getting a lot cleaner, sleeker, more pared down.



Peter Cadoux, Jeff Kaufman and Foster Lyons



Susan Allsberg

want to be able to eat there with their families; five or six people, but they also want to be able to accommodate sixteen or twenty and that works with a more open plan, a more contemporary space. **Steven Mueller:** I think people are still concerned about marketability, in the future will they still be able to sell their house? If their living room has become a billiards room or a sitting room, while they may not use it as a living room they have the space there so they can still sell the house.

Christopher Pagliaro: We do a lot of smaller waterfront properties and it took us a long time to be able to convince clients that the dining room was necessary but it shouldn't take prime real estate. So it's important clients understand that while the relationship of the dining room, family room and kitchen might not be traditional, you can still utilize the dining room.

Robert Keller: In terms of contemporary interiors we definitely see that in our business a lot, in terms of much more traditional exteriors with contemporary interiors. In my business I think this is a young person's game. A lot of my clients are young and from the city, and they brought that to the suburbs, that's where I see it coming from.

Peter Cadoux: What seems to be a dividing line is books. The classic library has gone away because our younger clients don't have any books. It's also about streamlining all of the stuff, storage has become a very big thing, I'm doing a house in New Canaan and there is a closet for every function. But the TV is out there and the rest of the media is in the basement because it's all remote. It therefore kind of coincides with the modernist ideal.

Foster Lyons: Who's the chicken and who's the egg? The client or the designers? Is it the clients that are pushing this or are they reacting to some trend with all the design professionals sending them in that direction?

Johnathan Wagner: It's the Magazines!!! (Laughter.)

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Mac Patterson and Scott Hobbs

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Foster Lyons: I'm a contractor so I'm going to do whatever the design professional tells me, but designers actually have some influence on what the client ends up with. So, are design professionals on average pushing a more contemporary idea or a classical one?

Susan Ailsberg: I don't think it's one thing or the other. I think everyone is doing it, I think it's a change.

Peter Cadoux: I'm kind of intrigued by all the responses because everybody in the room is saying pretty much the same thing. What I'm seeing is clients that don't want wasted space and technology is not such a horrible thing. I haven't really heard a contradictory thing except maybe the dining room component of it and there is a happy medium there. I do believe there is still a gathering area that wants to be larger than just the breakfast table but doesn't want to be ostracized to the front of the house where no one is going to use it, it can be used more if it's in a location in an open plan.



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Susan Alisberg, George Dumitru and Ira Grandberg

Susan Ailsberg: Just to go back to the dining room debate, they're not that many females here, but as someone who cooks...

Group: Hey, I cook too! So do I! You can't cook, I've eaten at your house... (general hilarity).

Susan Ailsberg: ...I feel that it's nice not to have to look at the mess. So it could be separated off but you don't want to look at the dishes or the mess you create when you're preparing a meal.

Jonathan Wagner: (Referencing traditional vs. contemporary) Wait, Peter, what the hell are you saying here? For me the question is rather than clothing a modern house in shingle style, why doesn't (the modernist shift) apply to the exterior? Call me idealistic but I'm just saying people want a modern house but they're afraid to do it.

Ed Parker: There's a sense of home that people seek in traditional architecture (exteriors), that's the communal idea of suburbia, it's the comfort of that home.

Jonathan Wagner: But don't you think that all of us could create a home that is not a reproduction on the outside, but something that is set to scale, with appropriate proportions and materials, and could be expressive of today, of 2015, without clothing or frosting the house in older, traditional...

Ed Parker: (Interrupting) This is that whole conversation about Modernism. Modernism started in the 20's, it's old. All those moves that we're making that are called Modernism, are stuff that has been regenerated or revamped over the years so why do people always say that traditional is not up-to-date? Well, it is because it gives people comfort, it gives people a sense of home. I think every architect takes pieces and combines them in a new and different way that says this is

home, and that is paramount.

Ira Grandberg: I think it is a combination of both. Respect to your perspective and respect to your purity on this whole thing, (nod to Jonathan) the bottom line is, we're talking about dining rooms and living rooms. Clients are afraid they're going to be stuck with a house that nobody is going to want.

Jonathan Wagner: Who gives a shit? (More hilarity.) I've done some pretty unusual projects...

Ira Grandberg: You have but that's the special client though, that's the special project...

Chris Pagliaro: (Interrupting) We just had a conversation that the beautiful thing about our practice is that we have clients who come to us that have confidence, who don't do things based on what other people think. So we have the ability to do certain things, but on the whole I think the general population is afraid to go that far.

Ira Grandberg: I agree with Jonathan on one level, it's very easy to do a bad contemporary house and it's very hard to do a good one. There is an art to doing good contemporary houses that transcends--I'll stick my neck out here--the art of doing a good traditional house.

Ryan Fletcher: What I have seen is that most tend to stay conservative and traditional with only hints of modernism on the exterior of their homes. However, inside there has been a huge movement towards clean lines and refreshing space. My feelings are that our lifestyles have become so complex and involved with so many moving objects in them, that it's not only refreshing but serene, to come home to a simple yet elegant lifestyle.

Michael Smith: I find that in my own work, interiors are much more modernist. I think I'm a modernist at heart, and I'm putting these

shingle style facades on these projects because people want that comfort exterior that feels like home. But as architects, how are we challenging ourselves to translate the more modern interior to a different exterior, whatever that is?

Scott Hobbs: People look at modern houses and think, it's going to leak like a sieve, this is a nightmare, but that is no longer true. If you're in New England, you're designing for a snow load, and you have a heck of a flat roof, you've also got a heck of an infrastructure there that you don't need most of the time. Whereas, if you have a pitched roof, you can shed the load, distribute it. So as the products continue to develop perhaps we'll see more of a shift toward more contemporary and modern structures.

Lucien Vita: We are pleased to find that clients who love modern design are feeling emboldened by the growing trend toward modern interiors, and in fact are looking for a fully modern exterior as well. We believe that the acceptance of our passion for modern interiors is leading to a growing confidence and acceptance of modern exteriors.

Howard Lathrop: People want energy efficient houses, they don't ask for contemporary or colonial, they want them energy efficient. So when you go through what it takes to make an energy efficient house, you end up with a contemporary vernacular on the outside and everyone wants contemporary on the inside, so I think it's technology that's driving a lot of this.

Michael Black: I'll go the opposite and say I don't think the trend is there. I think we're fooling ourselves if we think we're seeing a trend. I think we're talking the difference between style and form. It's about how we use spaces, the trend is coming with the Millennial generation and that's going to explode and change everything. Forget about traditional, contemporary, it's going to change the entire house. We're



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Peter Cadoux

talking about kids who watch TV on an iPhone and I think our mindset needs to change to that.

MOVING ON TO QUESTION 2

Matt Kolk: *Question number two is about purpose-built rooms. We're seeing a lot of this in our industry as well, wine rooms have always been there but more gyms are being built, we're seeing very sophisticated, high-end garages and out-buildings. Do you see this as a shift from creating homes with resale in mind to creating a purposeful home customized to the homeowner's tastes and lifestyles?*

Joseph Theriault: Yes. Media rooms, home theaters, wine cellars, second kitchens, sitting and breakfast rooms are not just a personal touch but becoming the norm. I think these rooms may be sought by future buyers and so improve resale for the client.

Mac Patterson: I have a client now, and in all respects the entire budget is going into just two rooms. And yet he's got the rest of it, but he just wants something for himself. People are saying I want this house, it's got everything else, and so they want to put in the one thing in it that gives them down-time.

Chuck Hilton: People want something about their house to be unique and special. They'll find those one or two spaces that are related to a hobby, or travel, or their life or business, that they're proud of and they want to build their experience into the house around them.

Foster Lyons: It seems as though people are sort of pulling their private country clubs into their houses. Having said that it seems the guys are doing it more than the women. The guy gets the golf swing room, the billiards room, the guy gets the garage.

Steve Mueller: What we're finding is that clients are downsizing to a 4,000 or 5,000 sq. ft. house and I think that's exactly what's happening. That now they know this is a home they're going to live in for the rest of their lives, so they're not concerned about resale, they're tailoring the home to their needs; the bar room, the billiard room, the wine cellar, the media room.

George Dimitru: I have the same experience; everyone comes and says I want a kitchen, a house, 3,000 sq. ft. Two weeks later we are at 8,000 sq. ft. I also have clients that built multiple projects. When they were young they went for the small house. And then they got a little older and decided, now I want that cigar room or a room for the dog.

Peter Cadoux: I can only speak from personal experience but I'm finding more of those unique spaces not gender-specific. We did have one project that sticks in my head. We were pretty much done, going through the drawings, and the client came to me and said, "Where's my f*** you! room?" I said, "Well, okay, I'm sure we can figure that out." So the next meeting they're both there and I said, "Here is your, um, room," and his wife turns to me and says, "Where's my f*** you! room?" (roar of laughter). So they each got their own space.

Jeff Kaufman: I find that people who are younger and have kids are pretty specific about what their needs are. Just to hit on the dining room thing, the people that really want dining rooms are the people that tell us their families come to them for holidays. But there are a huge number of things that happen in these houses that are really for kids which actually is, I think, kind of cool.

Rob Sanders: We see it more in the decision of what spaces to have, and how they're arranged. Not that many specialized function-spaces, but idiosyncratic layouts that meet their patterns of



Chris Pagliaro



Michael Black



Ed Parker

It's very easy to do a bad contemporary house and it's very hard to do a good one. There is an art to doing good contemporary houses that transcends--I'll stick my neck out here--the art of doing a good traditional house.

living and family needs. On the other hand, Laundry Rooms are the new 'must-have' spaces, outfitted beautifully to take the edge off the drudgery of the task. They're the follow-up to the super storage Mudroom.

WHICH BRING US TO QUESTION 3

Matt Kolk: *It seems that the homes we (ECH+D) are being presented with are getting larger in size. While the trend over the past several years has been towards smaller, more "smart-sized" homes, the trend we're now seeing is toward larger scale homes. Is this a sign that potential clients are lowering their caution economically? What do you feel the mentality of the client is today?*

Chris Pagliaro: I built my own house, it's 4,400 sq. ft. I moved into a 7,000 sq. ft. house for a year while I was building it. I walked in and said, "Gee, I've never lived in anything this big in my life." We only lived in a third of that house.

Peter Cadoux: What my office is getting is, "I want a house that's comfortable for the two of us, but can also house twenty-two." How can you do that and make it small?

Chris Pagliaro: Young people think about their friends, old people think about themselves. I had a guy pay me a 5% bonus if I could keep his house under 3,000 sq. ft. He





Rob Sanders



Robert Keller

didn't think I could do it. I did. And then they put an addition on. (Big laugh.)

MATT SAW THE NEED FOR AN INTERVENTION...

Matt Kolk: *I'm going to interrupt for a second... everybody hold up their hands if they are building a 7,000 sq. ft. house. (Most hands go up.) How about 8,000? (Most hands go up.) 10,000? (A good number of hands go up.) 20,000? (A number of hands go up.) 30,000? (A smattering of hands are in the air.) (Matt laughing.) We're getting smaller?*

Jonathan Wagner: The way I see it when you go from a 5,000, or 6,000 sq. ft. home to anything larger, it shifts from being a home to just being a big house.

George Dimitru: But Jonathan, what do you tell a client who says "I need 10,000 sq. ft.?"

Peter Cadoux: You tell him how much it costs. (Big burst of laughter.)

Scott Hobbs: I think we do a disservice if we don't find out what our client's needs really are. We built one 30,000 sq. ft. house that was one of the best homes because the people were really nice. They knew what they wanted and they had fun with it. We've built much smaller homes for people who really were building it to impress other people, and it was just a cold, very scary type of place to be in.

Dinyar Wadia: In my home of 5,000 sq. ft. I only use a third of it. So when my clients tell me they want to build an 8,000 sq. ft. house that grows to 14,000 sq. ft. overnight, I make them come to my house. I say, my house is 5,000 sq. ft., take a look, do you really need to have

a larger home?

Foster Lyons: There's no doubt that Fairfield County, Westchester County, Metropolitan New York, are this magnified microcosm of what is going on nationally. You can't deny the statistics, when the average house size has gone up even since the downturn. We've always built bigger houses here so they are that much bigger.

Ed Parker: Regardless of the size, our job is to provide something that works for the client. Some of them are really quirky ideas, but maybe it's something they've dreamed about their whole life. You're designing to the personality of your client. You're using your expertise to make it work and to make it beautiful and to make it water-tight. We debate the size but that's the choice of the client. The bigger the size means you have to inform them about the maintenance and the utilities and all those things.

The point that Jonathan brings up is important, and that is a societal argument about building these giant structures and is that irresponsible? But that is a separate argument.

Susan Alisberg: And it's irrelevant to the client. What I'm saying is that it is not an irrelevant conversation, but it is a separate conversation.

Jonathan Wagner: I know I'm the wrong architect for some people perhaps because of my idealism, but I'm the perfect architect for others. If I was going to build a big, beautiful house in Greenwich, I'd hire Chuck Hilton to do it or Dinyar because I couldn't do it as well as they could. But hopefully all of us have established a persona and a style that we're really, really, good at.

Ross Tiefenthaler: In reference to specialty rooms, that's a reflection that as architects you're meeting specific needs. People come up with



Dinyar Wadia and Jonathan Wagner



Joseph Theriault



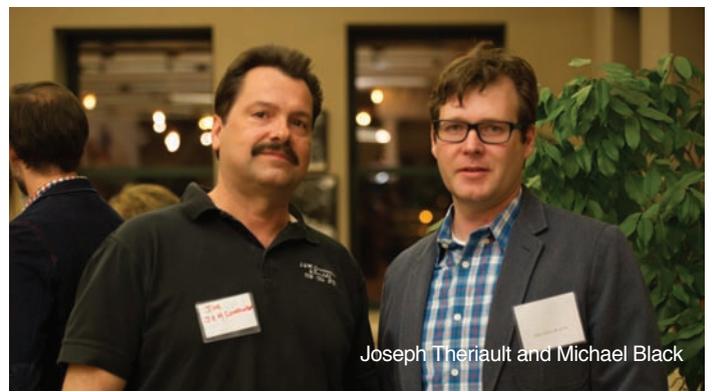
Howard Lathrop



Ryan Fletcher and Lucian Vita



Scott Hobbs, Mac Patterson and Dinyar Wadia



Joseph Theriault and Michael Black

their dreams and we're fortunate enough that we get to build those for people.

Tony Savino: I'll say from a long-term perspective I've been building in Greenwich for about 18 years and I've built multiple house for the same clients. I've built 10,000 to 12,000 sq. ft. houses and 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. houses. I think in general over a long period of time, the people who live in the 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. houses have been happier with their houses and have lived there longer than those who lived in 8,000, 9,000 and 10,000 sq. ft. homes. I'm sure Scott and some of the other builders here could speak to the fact that we build houses long after the architects are gone. And, we've remodeled houses that they've done and... you guys made a few mistakes. (Laughter.) But I do think the trend should be toward smaller houses.

Ira Grandberg: The reality is that when you do a bigger house, the sheer need to create circulation for all the rooms is mind-boggling.

Chuck Hilton: In 1970 I think the average house was 1,500 sq. ft. in the country. In 2000 it was 2,100 sq. ft., and now it is 5,000 to

10,000 sq. ft. I think it's just a trend that's on the uptick. Our technology is making it more affordable to build bigger houses.

And there was so much more, but we've almost run out of space. So just how do you determine what shape, style or size home is the right one for you? There are inventions in the works that will take us from the magic of alchemy to the tantalizing technology of an actual Star Trek-style holodeck; Project Hololens, Oculus Rift and the still shrouded in mystery, Magic Leap backed by Google, among them. Until you can walk and interact in a virtual reality version of your potential home, the best advice is to make an appointment with one of the talented visionaries of our Roundtable and have a conversation.

A very special "Thank You" to Sam Gault of Gault for bosting the event and to Foster Lyons of Horizen Builders who graciously sponsored the After Roundtable Dinner at Rive Bistro in Westport.

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Dinner at Rive Bistro following the Roundtable Discussion



Ira Grandberg



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