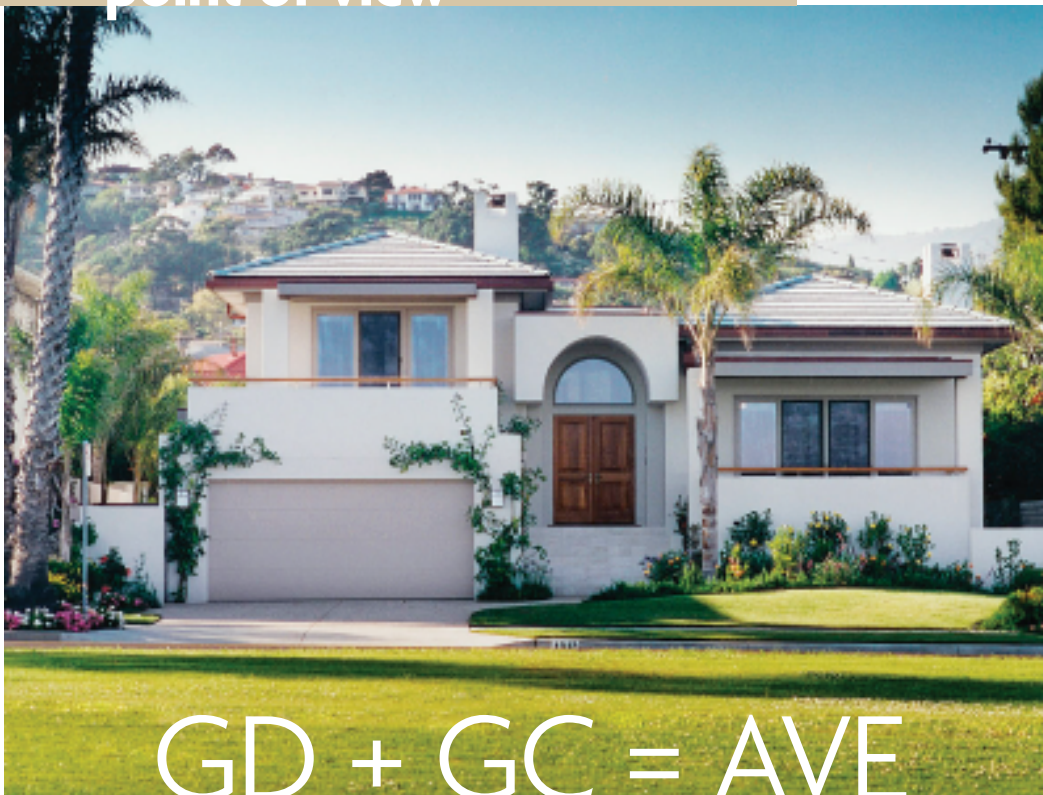


point of view



A simple equation for a long-lasting home

by Bruce Giffin

Over the years of building, one of the pleasures a home builder gets from their work is seeing how the homes they've built age and how people respond to them, use them and live in them. A builder's work stands for quite a while, so any mistakes that do get made become reminders of lessons learned about what works and what is comfortable—and what is not.

Yet, nothing is static. Lifestyles change—and they change pretty quickly. As a young man, I thought that what I built would stand for a hundred years. Having now remodeled some of those homes we've built a second and even a third time, I'm a little more philosophical about how long our work will last. However, one thing that has never changed is the formula: Good Design + Good Construction = Appreciation, Value + Enjoyment.

Good design begins with wisdom which is attained through experience and observation. Many of the best homes I've experienced were designed by people who had lived fulfilling lives, raised families and participated in the day-to-day rituals of our human existence. They had observed how an environment worked for those who

inhabited it, then used those lessons in the architecture that they created.

When we see the McMansionization of our neighborhoods, the wisdom of life's lessons is even more imperative to use. Privacy is a precious commodity and difficult to attain, but not impossible to design for if the plans are well thought out. A way to make sure that you respect your neighbors' privacy and create some valuable space for yourself in your building project is to take into account window and yard locations of adjacent properties. Windows and exterior doors need to be offset from the neighbors'. Windows can be raised high to let in light while providing privacy. They can be positioned so that they don't look into neighbors' backyards and bedrooms. Doing so increases the enjoyment and comfort for all parties.

Spending time on a site before you begin to build or remodel gives clues as to where you'll likely spend time when you're finished with your project. If you're uncomfortable on a certain location on your property, it's probably not going to change when you're finished building. The best designers and architects know how to create those spaces while making the overall concept pull together. You also have to allow for a little

serendipity and adjustment in window placement once the structure is up. New buildings typically need a little "massaging" to get openings placed just right and you should allow for that in your budgeting.

One of the most successful homes that we built was tucked in between two homes: one, a very large two story island style home that was built setback to setback in the late '80s, and the other a redwood contemporary home built in the late '70s. The site was on a very public drive overlooking an ocean side park. Don Pedersen was the architect and the challenge was to create a home that met the owners' needs while holding its own architecturally with the homes on both sides. Don took three passes at the design. The first was gorgeous but over the clients' budget. The second met the budget but was uninspiring. The third design was the home run—creative, distinctive, site specific, award-winning and in line with the budget.

It was easily approved by the city. In fact, because it met all of the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance's design criteria, it did not even require going in front of the Architectural Board of Review. The finished product complemented the streetscape very nicely and coming behind 9 months of planning, we constructed it in 5 months. People are amazed when they're told there is 3600 square feet of living space because it doesn't look that big.

There are very few privacy issues. One window in a bedroom had to be re-framed and re-ordered because once the home was framed, it became apparent that it would be uncomfortable for the occupants to be in the space with the house looming next door. Instead the view was oriented to the backyard. It won a number of awards and, four years after it was built, the original owners sold it for twice what they had invested in it. It continues to garner compliments and has aged well in the 9 years since we built it. Today, the design looks just as classic as the day we built it, reaffirming the formula: Good Design + Good Construction = Appreciation, Value + Enjoyment.

Bruce Giffin, of Giffin & Crane, is a Santa Barbara native who has been building and remodeling homes in Santa Barbara since 1978. He can be reached at bgiffin@giffinandcrane.com.

PHOTO COURTESY BRUCE GIFFEN