

TEXAS BUILDER

NOV/DEC 2018

12

Hurricane Harvey

A look at the rebuilding process on the one-year anniversary of the storm.

26

Member Profile

Texas 2018 Housing Hall of Honor
Inductees Patsy Smith & George Lewis

32

TAB Voter Guide

2018 Texas General Election Voter Guide



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FEATURES

12

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26

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Texas 2018 Housing Hall of Honor Inductees Patsy Smith & George Lewis

32

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2018 Texas General Election Voter Guide

08

President's Commentary

10

Executive Director's Message

21

On Council TAB's Developers Council

23

Legal Opinion Arbitration Trumps Litigation: Home Builders Construction Disputes

31

Government Relations The 86th Legislature is Upon Us

34

Speaking Out U.S. Senator John Cornyn

36

Featured Project Risher/Martin's Award Winning U-V House

40

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SET UP FOR SUCCESS:

RisherMartin's Award-Winning U-V House

Katie Carlson

Jeremy Martin of RisherMartin Fine Homes is no stranger to the construction business. A third-generation builder, he started getting familiar with construction sites at the age of four. Now, decades later, Jeremy and his business partner, Chris Risher, are becoming familiar with winning awards. At the 2018 TAB Star Awards, RisherMartin came away with an impressive number of accolades—10 wins, including the coveted Custom Builder of the Year award. But Jeremy and Chris don't want to take all the credit for the award-winning U-V House. "In order to get a great result, you've got to build a great team," Jeremy says. In partnering with a professional branding agency, local architects, and experienced clients, RisherMartin has certainly set themselves up for success.

What sets RisherMartin apart? This is the question that the company has tackled over the past few years. "Earlier in our career, I think our marketing message was a little more scattershot. We were trying to be all things to all people. We didn't really know what our identity was as a company." One thing they did know was that they were throwing a lot of money at marketing and hoping for the best. Jeremy says that one of their smartest moves was to

invest the money in a professional agency that could help them define their image, rather than continue trying to do it themselves. "I think sometimes builders are DIY guys and want to do this kind of stuff ourselves to save money. We've tried not to do that. We spend our time building houses and we let our branding agency spend their time building ads."

The branding agency helped RisherMartin to discover what they wanted to be as a company, what type of work they wanted to be doing, who they wanted to be working with, and how they could reach that audience. To put it simply, the agency helped them define their identity as a company and hone their message. "Within the last couple years, we've really dialed in on what we do well and what we do differently from the competition," Jeremy says. "We are able to be very focused in what we're saying, the way we're saying it, and who we're saying it to." Working with their agency, they put a unified message out across many marketing channels. Jeremy says, "No matter where our customer sees us, whether it's a job site sign, the website, social media or the brochure, they're getting this repetitive, consistent message." The investment in this message has certainly paid off, with



U-V HOUSE

WWW.RISHERMARTIN.COM

Project Location: Austin, TX

Builder: Risher Martin Fine Homes

HBA Affiliation: HBA of Greater Austin



RisherMartin taking home Star Awards for Best Sales Brochure and Best Print Ad this year.

With a better understanding of who they are as a company, and a better knowledge of their potential clients, they were able to focus their message to better reach their intended audience. Part of that intended audience was local architects. “As part of our marketing plan, we make it a point to go out and try to build relationships with architects in our market that we respect and whose work we admire.” As a result of reaching out in this way, when an architect is starting a project and the client is looking for a builder, that relationship paves the way for a meeting and interview for RisherMartin.

This was the case with the U-V House. Architect Jay Dupont of J Square Architecture brought his bold vision of a modern home as he worked with a couple from Florida—empty nesters looking to move to Austin to be closer to family. The homeowners had built several custom homes over the years. They knew exactly what they wanted, and, perhaps more importantly, the kind of experience they wanted to have. “I

think that when you’ve gone through the process three or four times you know what the pitfalls are,” Jeremy says. “You also have a strong sense of what you don’t want to happen again, and they voiced a lot of those concerns.”

Surprisingly, despite the ultra-contemporary design of the home, this was the clients’ first experience building modern. They were looking for a “large home that lives small”—a place that was durable, low maintenance, and energy efficient. “They wanted to enjoy their home, not maintain their home,” explains Jeremy. Being empty nesters, they wanted room for visiting family, but still wanted to feel comfortable and cozy when it was just the two of them. To accomplish this, the house is divided into two wings. The couple lives in one wing, and when no one is visiting, the guest wing can be shut off from the rest of the house. Even the mechanical systems can be shut down, which makes the house extremely energy efficient.

The site selection and house orientation, coupled with floor-to-ceiling windows throughout, provide amazing views while still allowing privacy. The master bath showcases a freestanding tub surrounded by windows and bathed in natural light. A tiled



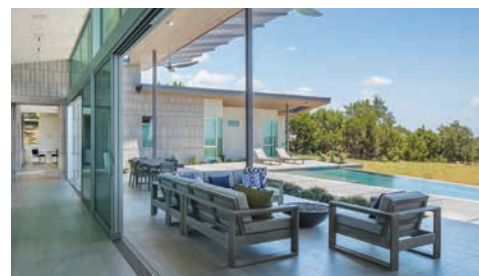
"There's no molding, trim, or texture to hide mistakes as there would be in a more traditional home. It all pays off in the end when it works, but if you don't know what you're doing, it can be pretty treacherous."

shower sits in the center of the large room, situated to allow the homeowners to enjoy the view even from inside. In the master bedroom, a wood ceiling treatment warms up the contemporary look of the sharp lines and high-gloss furniture.

The kitchen boasts more high-gloss cabinetry and top-of-the-line appliances. A large island is just one of many gathering spots. The cut Lueder limestone walls and butterfly roof create asymmetrical and interesting lines and add to the contemporary, sleek feel. A covered patio stretches the length of the house, with multiple seating areas surrounding a tranquil infinity pool. It's easy to see how this home could win five Star Awards.

Modern design, Jeremy says, looks deceptively simple. The clean lines, lack of clutter, and abundant natural light bely a straightforward design, but it's not that easy. "There's very little margin for error. And there are very few degrees of freedom when you're trying to make all these different building components come together—these floor-to-ceiling glass windows, all of the stone work, smooth drywall, and high-gloss cabinetry. The way these components are assembled, you literally can't miss by a quarter of an inch because it throws the whole house off. The problem is if you make an error early in the process and get off by a quarter of an inch, and then in the next phase of construction you're off by another quarter of an inch, and the next phase you're off... these small errors eventually compound, and the whole thing breaks." There's no molding, trim, or texture to hide mistakes as there would be in a more traditional home. "It all pays off in the end when it works, but if you don't know what you're doing, it can be pretty treacherous. We had an extremely skilled project manager that was running this job for us. Obviously, he did an amazing job."

This low tolerance for error is one reason that RisherMartin has a very rigid pre-construction process. They plan for each and



every part of the home before even one shovel hits the dirt. Each project is documented with a process they call “The Book,” which lays out every detail for the home ahead of time. “A project that’s well-planned is half built,” says Jeremy. “We can accurately tell our project managers, our clients, and our trade partners exactly what should be built and how it should be built, which is very difficult to do in the custom home business.” It’s this attention to detail at the beginning of the process that delivers a great home at the end, and ensures an enjoyable experience during the build.

For this specific build, the pre-construction period lasted a full year, with the construction itself taking 15 months. “This was the most technical, challenging home we’ve ever constructed, but the fact that we were on budget and on schedule, and that we were able to deliver it with almost no change orders—that is a real testament to our system, our process, our people, and how we execute.”

Word of mouth is crucial for any builder to grow their clientele, and Jeremy believes that membership in TAB can aid in that goal. He explains that in addition to the educational opportunities that the association provides, each member pushes themselves

and their fellow builders to be better. Even though they are competitors, helping each other only improves the industry for everyone. “We’re pushing each other higher for the benefit of the overall building community. Ultimately, we want the clients to get the best experience possible,” Jeremy explains. “The home builders association has been a huge piece of that for us.”

Even with the prestigious Custom Home Builder of the Year award on the shelf, RisherMartin’s aspirations are humble: they want to keep delivering on their promises and delighting their clients and architects. When Jeremy reflects on the best part of working on this award-winning custom home, it isn’t the advanced mechanical systems or the clean, crisp lines, but rather the client’s experience that matters the most. “We put a lot of focus and energy into the journey that our clients are on during the build process; we want it to be fun for them, we want it to be low stress, we don’t want them on edge the whole way through. I enjoy the fact that we got the outcome that we wanted, and that the process was as smooth as we thought it was going to be and the journey itself ended up being a good one for the architect and for our client—I guess that’s what I’m most proud of.” ■