

from the ground UP

A local builder and architect
give us a glimpse of their work-in-progress

BY NEDRA BLOOM

PHOTOS BY JASON NORMAN

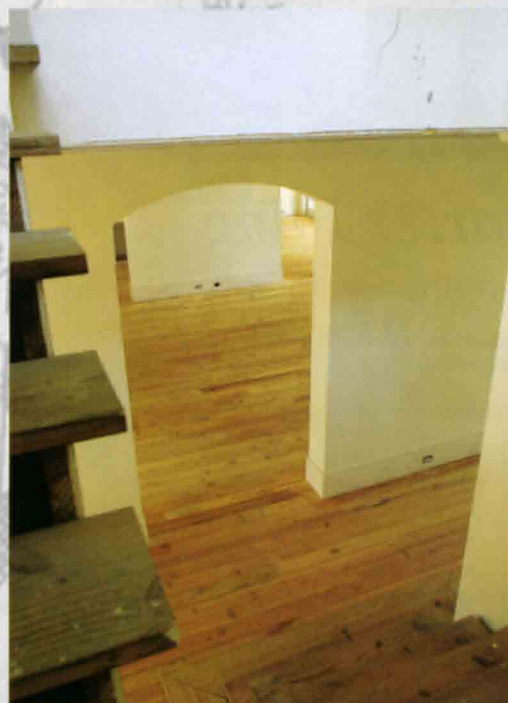
Clean architectural lines that lead to amazing views of the Bay characterize this Daphne home designed by Pete Vallas.

Axes, order and rhythm, balance and harmony.

For architect Pete J. Vallas, they are the key elements of home design.

For contractor David Jansen, they are the keys to a successful building project.

And for homeowner Andy Citrin, they mean a great view every step of the way across his new home on the waterfront in Daphne.



Citrin doesn't make the trek from master bedroom to playroom every day, though. He and his wife Jeannie and their four children — Sarah, Kaki, Andy and Gigi — won't move into their new home till July.

The unfinished nature of their home offers a good opportunity to look at its design and construction.

The Citrins bought the property a decade ago and moved into the ranch-style home that used to stand there. But they weren't satisfied. They loved the property but didn't care for the low ceilings or boxy feel of the house.

So they checked with builders and looked at standardized plans, they considering adding on to the existing house. None of those options seemed "cost-effective," says Jeannie. "We still wouldn't have what we wanted."

But what did they want? They weren't sure.

Jeannie thought of Vallas. He had designed her sister's home, which she loves, so she contacted him. They found him at a good time. He prefers to work on only two or three projects at a time, so he can be involved with every step, but it sometimes means potential clients have to delay their project to work with him. Vallas limits his practice to houses, saying, "A house is the most important kind of building because it's what you care most about." At the outset, they just talked about what they wanted. "An old Bay house," Jeannie describes it, though she could-



Experience a New Orleans treasure at an exceptional price.



French Quarter Fling from \$109* per room per night

This summer, indulge yourself with luxurious service, outstanding cuisine and a relaxed, upscale atmosphere right in the heart of the French Quarter. And at an affordable price, too.

Package includes: lavish accommodations, complimentary bottle of champagne, discount coupons for shopping.

Ask about weekday specials.

For reservations contact your travel agent, call the hotel directly at 504-586-0300, call 877-586-0300, or email us at reserv@royalsonestano.com.

A Grand Hotel in the French Quarter™
Royal Sonesta Hotel
New Orleans

300 Bourbon Street, New Orleans, LA 70130
www.royalsonestano.com

*Single or double occupancy, plus tax. Two children under 17 stay free in room with parents.
Third person in room: \$30. Not available for groups or during special events. Not all rooms at these rates.
Valid through September 16, 2003. Subject to availability.



n't have said just what she meant by that.

They knew they wanted to take advantage of the magnificent waterfront view, they wanted space to entertain and a place that was suited for their children — “casual and kid friendly,” in Jeannie’s words.

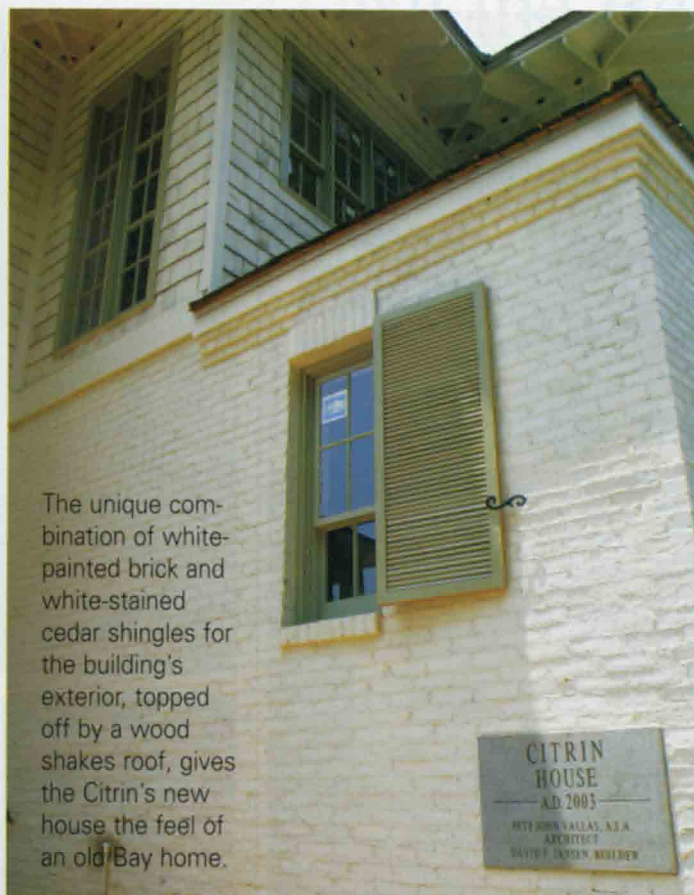
“We knew what we wanted in it, but not outside,” Andy adds.

Vallas listened, then drove with them around the Bay area, listening again as they pointed out features they liked or didn’t in a wide variety of homes.

Working from those sketchy ideas, Vallas began his design.

“From the first time I saw the outside elevations, I said ‘bingo!’” Jeannie recalls.

Tucked into a nook in an established Daphne area, the house needed two fronts to welcome visitors — one facing the drive for overland-arrivals and the other facing the Bay. Vallas pro-



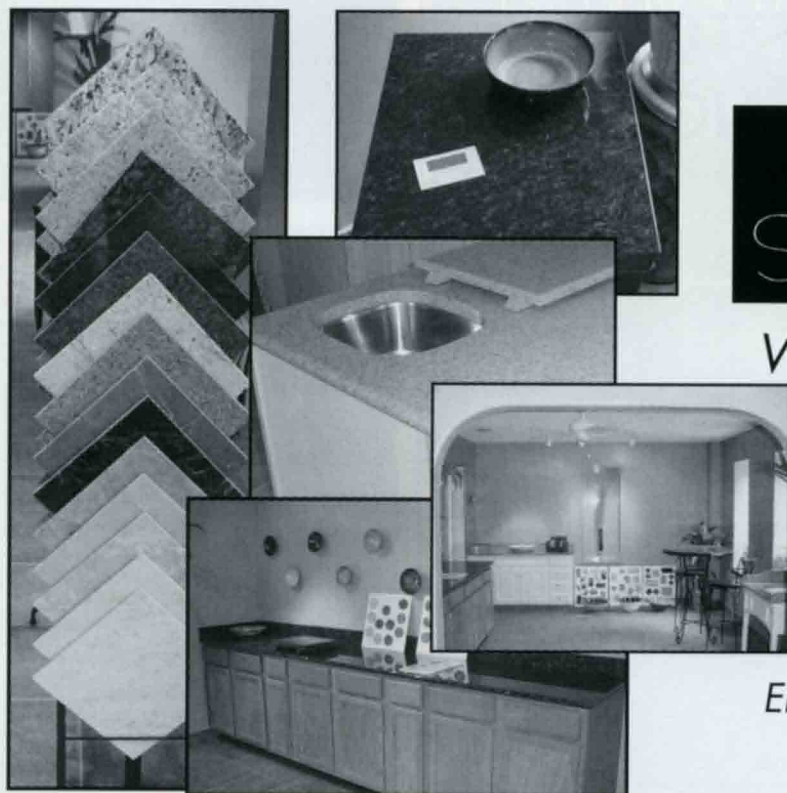
The unique combination of white-painted brick and white-stained cedar shingles for the building's exterior, topped off by a wood shakes roof, gives the Citrin's new house the feel of an old Bay home.

vided for it with a porch on each side, one up just a step from the stone-like entry drive; the other up from the terrace above the Bayfront pool. And if you lift your eyes, there's actually a third porch, atop the main floor porch on the water side and screened in for safety, since it opens off the kids' playroom.

The lower section of the house is white-painted brick below — they picked the paint color on a drive through New Orleans — and the upper section is white-stained cedar shingles. A wood shakes roof covers the peaks and angles that shape the roofline. On the Bayside, tucked in the angles near the porch, is a roof section of Galvalume, looking for all the world like an old tin roof, but far easier to care for.

Beneath the eaves, the rafter tails march boldly around the roof, with circular vents between.

Shutters look decorative, providing a touch of mossy green on the other-



All-Star Products
All-Star Service

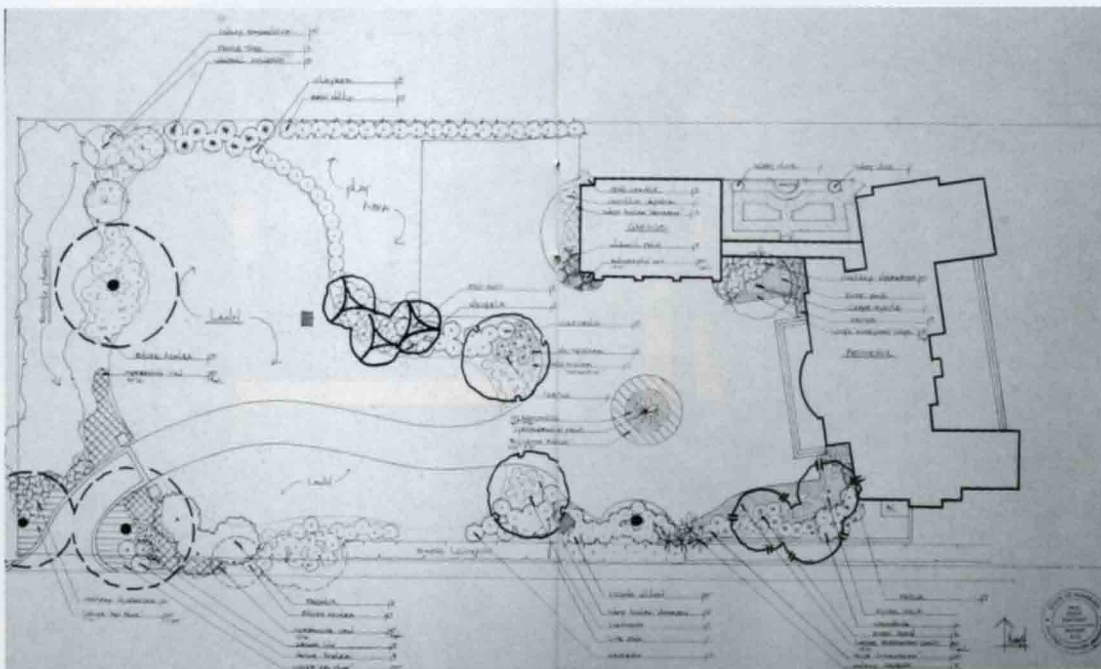
ALL-STAR
STONE, INC.

When Quality Matters

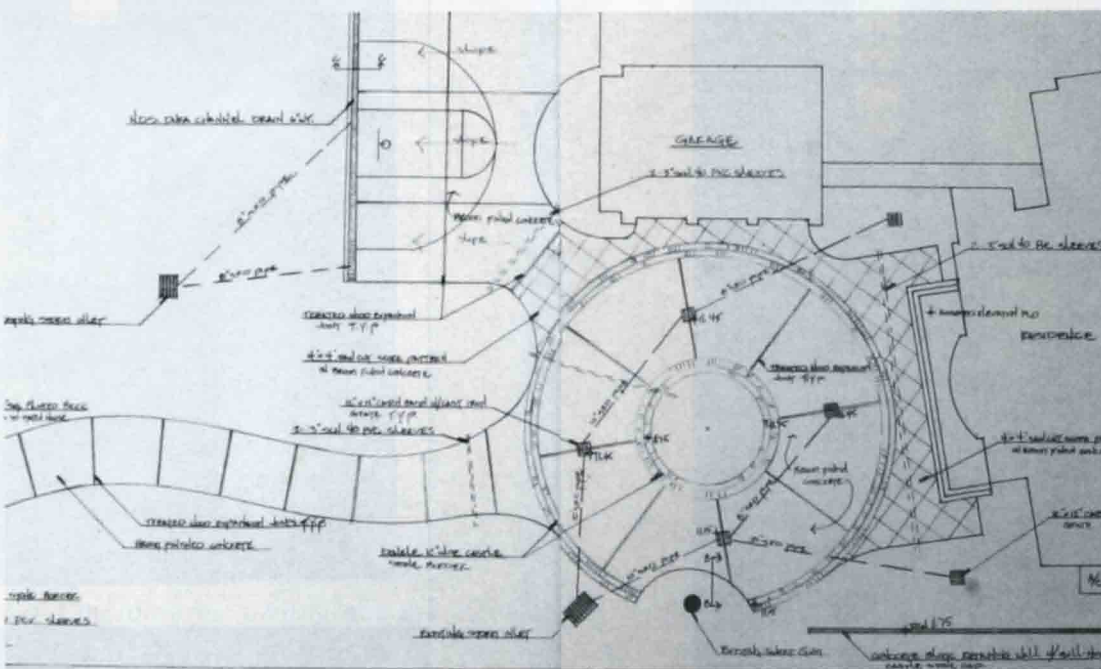
*Granite, Marble, and
Engineered Stone Fabricators*

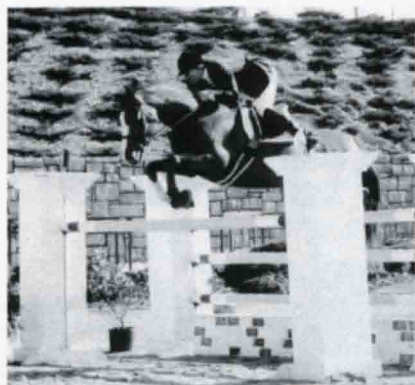
www.allstarstone.com

3104 Lees Lane • Mobile, Alabama 36693 • 251-660-9055



Above and Below – Renderings by Landscape Architect Paul Fontenot that depict how the Citrin's property will look upon their project's completion. The finished landscape will include a circular drive, a basketball court and a swimming pool in the backyard. **Right** – The unfinished façade of the Citrin home.





ACCOLADE FARMS

**WEEKLY SUMMER
RIDING CAMP**
JUNE 1 - AUGUST 15
AGES 6 AND UP

Contact Elizabeth Semon for
rates and schedules

251-591-5834

BOARDING

Accolade Farms is located on 60 acres of grassland in Grand Bay, Alabama. We have 32 stalls as well as four 10 acre pastures for our pasture boarders. Boarding facilities are also available for stallions and mare in foal. Blanketing, turn-out and bathing are included. Exercise (riding or hand-walking) are available.

TRAINING

Accolade Farms is a full service boarding and training facility. We offer training for horses and riders of any age or experience.

Accolade Farms is owned and operated by Holly and Greyson Shepherd. Holly remains one of the top riders in the nation and her students have competed in many national finals.

"Holly is one of the best riders in the nation and by far the best rider in the state of Alabama"

—Dennis Murphy
Member of the 1976
US Olympic Equestrian Team



wise white exterior, but the brackets like tipped-over S's hold back serious storm shutters that swing across to protect the windows. Where one window nestles close to a gable, the shutter is trimmed to match the roofline.

Walk in the front door — the door from the street side, that is — and you see through the house and out the window of the master bedroom. Through the arch to the right is the staircase, to the left an oval dining room, open to the main living area through two more arched openings — offering clear sightlines to the bay, even from the street side of the house.

Master bedroom, living area, kitchen to make Emeril envious, and playroom set apart with glass-paned pocket doors — the four rooms across the Bay side boast of their view with expanses of windows. Every window is in proportion to the others and each one can be opened to take advantage of the bay breeze.

Sleek and contemporary in its

openness and understated white walls, the interior catches you off guard with antique cypress doors found during another New Orleans trip and heart pine floors fitted with wood from a demolished factory up north. One and a half inches thick, the flooring can be refinished time and again.

In two places — the walkway from the garage and the halls by the master bedroom — Vallas let the angle of the property dictate the angle of the walls. But elsewhere, everything lines up along axes.

Builder Jansen loves the challenge of the perfect lines. They're not necessarily easy to work with, he says, "but it makes a reason for everything."

Jansen's business is split between commercial and residential building, and he first met Andy Citrin while remodeling the lawyer's Daphne office.

Unlike many contractors, Jansen enjoys working with architects. Though 99 percent of builders prefer to work without the design profes-



In this expansive and detailed kitchen, cabinet doors will be made to fit snugly inside the frame, rather than lapping over the supports.

HANDCRAFTED BRONZE ARCHITECTURAL HARDWARE



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
HARDWARE

Rayford & Associates

2567 Old Shell Road • Mobile, Alabama
(251) 476-1460



Mobile's Best Kept Secret

Featuring 1800 to 2200 square feet of living space, attentive and professional staff, and naturally beautiful surroundings to sooth your spirits.
The search is over...



Maison Imperial

APARTMENTS

3920 Berwyn Drive S. • Mobile, AL 36608
P: 251-344-1705 • maisondv@bellsouth.net

sionals, Jansen says it's easier when you do. "If you buy plans from a book," Jansen says, "there's nobody to help you." Moreover, the homeowner is relying on the contractor to make decisions about his house.

But Jansen and Vallas consult with each other frequently — saving time and money for the client and creating a more valuable house.

While he subcontracts insulation, HVAC, plumbing and electrical work, most of the others work directly for Jansen.

Most of what demonstrates a good builder doesn't show, Jansen says — it's in the framing and the attic — but some does. For example, the house should be tight, the sheetrock true and the molding corners should be invisible.

In the kitchen, cabinet doors will fit snugly inside the frame, rather than lapping over the supports. Is it important? "It's like coffee," says Jansen. Recessed cabinet doors are like perked coffee; they take more time and effort, but they're just better than the drip version where hot water runs just once past the grounds.

Lots of things are like that, he said. In the 1950s and 60s, people thought ranch houses were the wave of the future, with low ceilings, wall-to-wall carpet and great similarity among the houses in a neighborhood. "They were wrong."

Now people prefer individuality and a more old-fashioned level of quality. Look at the pocket doors, he said, sliding it easily from its hidden space. They all but disappeared after builders started installing them sloppily on cheap hardware. When they're well-balanced on solid tracking, they slide easily with just a touch.

In some places, Jansen uses new technology to achieve an old look. As he walks through the construction site, the air hose for a nail gun hangs over the railing. It's made finish nails

practical again, Jansen said. Even careful builders, using a nail to drive a finish nail, sometimes missed and left a hammer dent in the molding, he explained. Now the nail goes in straight and true, and the friction heat of nail moving through the wood activates glue at the nail tip so they stay concealed — and the finished molding is free of hammer dents.

A nail gun yes, but you won't find vinyl inside or out, Jansen says. "This is a 'real' house — they hold up better." Vinyl is to houses what polyester is to shirts or stainless steel to flatware, Vallas quips. Cotton is just nicer for shirts, sterling for your well-dressed table, and wood and brick for your home.

The Citrins like that feeling of quality surrounding them. "Even when I'm writing the checks, I know I'm writing them for something that will be beautiful," says Andy.

The four walk through picking out their favorite features.

Jansen is partial to the balcony and back porch.

The kitchen and the back porch with its own fireplace appeal especially to Jeannie.

"It's the windows," says Andy. "Every step has a view."

Vallas has a harder time picking a favorite element, but enjoys knowing that even though the floors and doors — and a cutting board and brick saved from the original ranch house — are actually old, the house has the ambience of a much older home. He was delighted when Citrins reported that passers-by had inquired about their big remodeling project instead of new building project.

How well have they accomplished that goal? Just take a boat 300 yards off shore and try to pick out which is the new house. It fits right in to its surrounding, like an old Bay house in rhythm, balance and harmony with its neighbors. ■