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Cohesive Construction: An Integrated Design and Build Team Offers Homeowners Flexibility and Reliability By Cathy Fisher



This new Oakland home exemplifies how successful design and construction creates a home of beauty and balance.

Homeowners often have dreams of a room addition or renovation, but when it actually comes time to seriously consider the project, they have a lot of questions. Will the new construction integrate into the house's design or will it look tacked on? And between the budgeting, planning, and possible construction delays, is it just too much to deal with? When it comes to these kinds of large home improvement projects, it's

important to enlist a full-service design and build firm.

The advantage of an integrated design and construction firm is that all members of the team are on the same page throughout the entire process. "In order to build well, you must have all of the team members in place: the architect, designer, the contractor, and the homeowner," says Steve Albert, president of S. E. A. Construction in San

Mateo. "You cannot build well without all the legs of the table being in place."

Steve explains that having respect for one another and listening to each other's ideas creates a more solid connection, and therefore a more successful and economically feasible project. "Our association with architects and interior designers creates many options for our clients that would not be available to them otherwise," he states. "This close collaboration also allows clients a higher level of design."

S. E. A. has been in business for 19 years, operating as a one-stop shop for homeowners looking for a custom yet cost-efficient renovation or new addition. S. E. A. stands out in its ability to be flexible in design, not wedding itself to any particular style of architecture. "We emphasize making our additions and renovations look like they've always been there," notes Mark Tetrault, design director for S. E. A. "We endeavor to enhance style so that the old and the new are seamless."

A recent home designed and built by S. E. A. in Oakland illustrates -JW an architectural form can inspire timelessness and simplicity, but "so have a modern edge. The large, deep overhangs and traditional rooflines speak to iconic images of home, while more modern touches can be found in the details. S. E. A. also used brick along the lower portion of the house, which was color matched to existing earth and materials in the area. Meanwhile, the colors on the house were coordinated to the on-site grasses and trees. "We made a real effort to ground the building in its natural context," explains Mark.

In addition to creating homes of beauty and balance, S. E. A. also prides itself on making the whole process as smooth and enjoyable as possible for clients. This becomes possible when the builder, architect, and designer are working as a team, and closely collaborating with the homeowner. "Any process as complex and detailed as ours yields better results when managed as a team effort," says Steve.

Another way that S. E. A. eases client frustration is through its familiarity with local government building requirements. "We work with all the different jurisdictions along the Peninsula and each has its own guidelines," notes Mark. "Over time, we've familiarized ourselves with the cities' requirements; knowing each city's prerequisites makes approvals easier."

Steve reveals that having design director Mark Tetrault and architect Marc Lindsell on staff really helps him as a builder. "Builders are trained to build



Using surrounding materials as inspiration for color integrates the home into its environment.

and architects are trained in design. An integrated design and build approach yields a more cohesive building product tailored directly to the homeowners' needs," states Steve. "This effective

collaboration makes the process more efficient and therefore less costly, which is especially important here in California."

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