



LUXURY HOMES OF TEXAS

The Texas Custom Home Planning Guide

What to Know Before You Design, Budget or Build

Better Homes Begin With Better Decisions.

Built on Integrity. Guided by Vision. Inspired by Dreams.

A Note From Tim

Building a custom home can be one of the most rewarding projects a family ever takes on. It can also be one of the most complicated. The difference is often not the size of the house or the price of the finishes. It is how well the project is planned, how clearly the team communicates, and how early the important decisions are made.

I created this guide because homeowners usually begin asking questions long before they are ready to sign a construction contract. They are looking at land, talking with architects, trying to understand cost, and wondering when the builder should become involved. Those early decisions can shape the entire project.

My goal is not to turn you into a builder. It is to help you understand the process well enough to ask better questions, recognize the decisions that matter, and enter the project with clearer expectations.

A true custom home should be built around the client, the property, and the vision. The better those three things are understood from the beginning, the better the opportunity to create a home that feels right when it is finished.

We are not simply building a house for our clients. We are building it with them.

— **Tim Lansford**

Luxury Homes of Texas

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it once from beginning to end, then come back to the sections that match where you are in the process. If you are evaluating land, begin with the property. If design is underway, focus on team coordination, budget development, and owner decisions. If you are ready to choose a builder, use the questions and checklists near the end.

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01 Start With the Right Questions

A custom home starts with more than a floor plan. It starts with understanding what the home needs to accomplish for the people who will live there.

Before design moves too far, spend time defining the purpose of the project. How do you want the home to live day to day? What spaces matter most? How do you entertain? Do you work from home? Are there hobbies, collections, vehicles, accessibility needs, pets, or family traditions that should influence the design?

These questions may sound personal rather than technical, but they are exactly what make a custom home custom. The answers influence square footage, circulation, storage, room relationships, outdoor living, mechanical systems, technology, and eventually cost.

Think Beyond the Room List

A list of bedrooms, bathrooms, and square footage is useful, but it does not describe how the home should feel or function. A better starting point is to describe how you want to live in it. Think about mornings, weekends, holidays, guests, work, hobbies, and the way your family actually uses space.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

What do we love about our current home? What frustrates us? Which spaces do we use every day? What have we always wanted but never had? What would make this home feel distinctly ours?

Define the Priorities

Most projects eventually face trade-offs. Knowing your non-negotiables early helps the design team make better decisions later. If the view, kitchen, garage, outdoor living, energy performance, or privacy matters more than something else, say so. Priorities are not limitations; they are guidance.

02 Understand the Property Before the House

The property is not simply where the home will sit. It is one of the most important design and budget variables in the entire project.

A beautiful lot can still create expensive challenges. Access, drainage, soils, utilities, easements, setbacks, topography, trees, orientation, neighborhood restrictions, and site logistics can influence what can be built and what it will cost to build it.

Whenever possible, evaluate the property with the builder and design team before the purchase is final. A second set of experienced eyes may identify opportunities or constraints that are not obvious during a typical real estate showing.

What to Evaluate

Look at how the property drains, where utilities are located, whether significant grading may be required, how construction equipment will access the site, where the sun moves across the property, and whether neighboring homes or topography affect privacy and views.

Also review the survey, easements, setbacks, community design requirements, and any information available about soils or previous improvements. The objective is not to eliminate every unknown. It is to reduce avoidable surprises before the design becomes dependent on assumptions.

WHAT WE SEE HOMEOWNERS MISS

The purchase price of the lot is only part of the land decision. A less expensive property can become more expensive if it requires major retaining walls, unusual foundations, extensive utility work, difficult access, or significant drainage improvements.

03 Assemble the Right Team

Exceptional custom homes are collaborative. The key is getting the right people involved early enough for their expertise to influence the project.

Depending on the project, the team may include the owner, architect, builder, interior designer, structural engineer, civil engineer, landscape architect, lighting designer, technology consultant, pool designer, and specialty trades or fabricators.

The goal is not to have more people in every meeting. The goal is to have the right expertise available before important decisions are locked in.

Choose for Fit, Not Just Reputation

A talented professional may still be the wrong fit for a particular project. Look for people with experience at the level of complexity you are considering, a communication style that works for you, and a willingness to collaborate with the rest of the team.

Ask how they handle disagreements, how decisions are documented, how often they communicate, and what they need from you to do their best work. A strong team should make the project clearer, not more confusing.

A GOOD TEAM CAN DISAGREE

Healthy collaboration does not mean everyone agrees immediately. It means the team can challenge ideas, explain consequences, and arrive at a decision without losing momentum or respect.

04 Bring the Builder In Early

One of the most common mistakes in custom building is waiting until the drawings are nearly complete before asking the builder to participate.

The earlier the builder is involved, the earlier construction knowledge can influence design. That can improve constructability, identify long-lead items, test budget assumptions, and help the architect understand where certain details may have cost or schedule consequences.

Early builder involvement does not mean the builder controls the design. It means the design develops with better information.

Why Timing Matters

A decision that is easy to change on paper may be expensive to change after engineering, permitting, procurement, or construction has started. Bringing construction input into the conversation early allows the team to preserve the design intent while identifying practical alternatives when needed.

EARLIER IS USUALLY BETTER

If you are already working with an architect, it is not too early to begin talking with a builder. If you have not selected an architect yet, the builder may also help you think through the type of design team the project needs.

05 Preconstruction: Where the Build Really Begins

Good construction starts long before anyone starts framing walls.

Preconstruction is the period when the team turns design information into a buildable plan. It is where drawings are reviewed, budgets are developed, schedules begin to take shape, procurement issues are identified, and major decisions are organized.

The exact scope varies by project, but strong preconstruction often includes constructability review, preliminary pricing, trade input, site logistics, permit coordination, selection tracking, schedule planning, long-lead procurement, and clarification of responsibilities.

Why Preconstruction Matters

Good preconstruction does not eliminate every surprise. It improves the team's ability to manage them. It also gives the owner more opportunities to make decisions while choices are still flexible instead of after the work is underway.

THE GOAL IS CLARITY

Before construction starts, everyone should have a clearer understanding of what is being built, what is included, what remains undecided, what the current budget assumes, and what decisions are coming next.

06 Build a Realistic Budget

A custom home budget is not one number. It is a financial picture that becomes more accurate as the project becomes more defined.

Early budgets may rely on historical information, assumptions, allowances, and preliminary quantities. As the design progresses, those placeholders should be replaced with actual selections, trade input, and increasingly specific pricing.

The objective should not be to produce the lowest possible number early in the process. A number that looks attractive but ignores site work, selections, specialty systems, or realistic allowances is not useful.

Understand the Cost Drivers

Architecture, structural complexity, site conditions, material choices, mechanical systems, window and door packages, cabinetry, stone, landscaping, pools, technology, and owner selections can all have a significant effect on cost. Two homes of similar square footage can have very different budgets.

Use Cost Per Square Foot Carefully

Cost per square foot can be useful for broad comparison, but it is rarely precise enough to budget a true custom home by itself. It does not explain the size of the garage, amount of outdoor living, site conditions, quality of systems, level of finishes, or complexity of the architecture.

ASK WHAT IS INCLUDED

Whenever you receive a budget number, ask what is included, what is excluded, what is an allowance, what assumptions were made, and what major decisions are still unresolved.

Plan for Contingency

A contingency is not an admission that the project is poorly planned. It is recognition that custom construction contains unknowns. The appropriate amount depends on the project, level of documentation, site conditions, and how much remains undecided.

07 Understand the Schedule

A construction schedule should do more than provide a completion date. It should help manage the project.

A strong schedule identifies major milestones, trade sequencing, inspections, procurement lead times, design deliverables, and owner decisions. It also shows how one activity affects the next.

Custom homes are dynamic. Weather, material availability, field conditions, inspections, design changes, and owner decisions can all affect sequencing. The schedule should be actively managed and updated as conditions change.

The Owner Is Part of the Schedule

Some of the most important schedule dates belong to the owner. Appliances, cabinetry, plumbing fixtures, lighting, stone, flooring, and specialty items often need decisions long before installation. When a decision is late, the impact can travel through several trades.

A DATE IS NOT A PLAN

A projected completion date without milestones, decision deadlines, procurement dates, and sequencing is not a complete schedule. Ask how the schedule will be managed throughout the build.

o8 Manage Decisions Before They Become Delays

The issue is rarely the number of decisions in a custom home. It is when those decisions are made.

A late appliance decision can affect cabinetry and electrical. A late plumbing selection can affect rough-in. A late tile or stone choice can affect lead times, substrate preparation, and installation sequencing. Everything connects.

Good project management identifies upcoming decisions early, gives the owner enough information to make them, and explains what happens if the decision is delayed.

Create a Decision System

Whether the project uses software, shared schedules, meeting notes, or another system, the owner should be able to see what decisions are upcoming, who is responsible, and when answers are needed.

DECISIONS SHOULD NOT FEEL LIKE EMERGENCIES

If every selection feels urgent, the system is probably reacting instead of planning. The goal is to make decisions with enough time to understand the options and consequences.

o9 Expect Change - and Manage It Well

Change is normal on a true custom home. The important issue is how the change is handled.

Owners refine ideas. Designs evolve. Materials become unavailable. Field conditions reveal new information. Better opportunities sometimes appear during construction.

A disciplined change process keeps those decisions visible. Whenever practical, the team should define what changed, why it changed, what it costs, whether it affects the schedule, and what other work may be affected before significant work proceeds.

Avoid Informal Changes

A quick conversation on the jobsite can feel harmless, but undocumented changes create confusion. Even small decisions can affect multiple trades. Clear documentation protects everyone and gives the owner a reliable record of what was approved.

CHANGE IS NOT THE ENEMY

Uncontrolled change is. A custom project should have room to evolve without allowing scope, cost, and schedule to become unclear.

10 Know What Quality Looks Like

Some of the most important parts of a home are the parts you will never see once construction is complete.

Foundation work, framing, waterproofing, flashing, insulation, air sealing, mechanical systems, plumbing, electrical, drainage, and structural connections all disappear behind finished surfaces.

The visible details matter too, but a luxury finish cannot compensate for poor work underneath it. Quality has to be managed throughout construction, not inspected into the project at the end.

Ask How Quality Is Managed

A builder should be able to explain how work is reviewed, how trade issues are addressed, when inspections occur, and how critical details are documented before they are covered.

QUALITY IS A PROCESS

The best time to correct a problem is while the work is visible and accessible. Strong quality control happens throughout the project.

11 Communication and Accountability

Clients should not have to wonder what is happening with their project.

Good communication provides the information the owner needs to understand current status, upcoming work, pending decisions, budget changes, schedule changes, and open issues.

More communication is not always better communication. The standard should be clear, timely, useful information.

Know Who Owns the Next Step

A custom residence may involve dozens of companies and hundreds of people. That makes accountability even more important. At any point in the project, someone should know who owns the next action, what information is missing, and when it is due.

ASK ABOUT THE COMMUNICATION RHYTHM

Before construction starts, understand how often meetings occur, how updates are delivered, where decisions are documented, and who your primary point of contact will be.

12 From Construction to Completion

The final stages of a project deserve the same attention as the beginning.

Completion is not one day. It is a process that may include final inspections, correction lists, system testing, owner orientation, documentation, warranty information, final accounting, and completion of remaining details.

A strong closeout process helps the owner understand the home and provides a cleaner transition from construction to ownership.

Finish Strong

Projects often lose momentum near the end because everyone can see the finish line. That is exactly when discipline still matters. The goal is not simply to get close. The goal is to finish well.

ASK ABOUT AFTER COMPLETION

Understand the builder's warranty process, how service requests are handled, and what documentation you should receive when the project is complete.

13 Questions to Ask Before You Build

The right questions can tell you a great deal about how a builder or design team thinks.

- When do you prefer to become involved in the design process?
- What does your preconstruction process include?
- How do you develop and update the project budget?
- How do you handle allowances and selections?
- How do you build and manage the construction schedule?
- How are owner decisions tracked and communicated?
- How are changes documented and approved?
- How often will we receive project updates?
- How do you manage quality before work is covered?
- How do you handle problems when the answer is not obvious?
- Who will be responsible for day-to-day project leadership?

- How do you coordinate architects, designers, consultants, and trades?
- What should we expect during completion and warranty?

LISTEN TO HOW THEY ANSWER

You are not looking for perfect promises. You are looking for clear thinking, realistic expectations, a defined process, and a willingness to explain how the project will be led.

14 Custom Home Readiness Checklist

You do not need every answer before you begin, but the following checklist can help you see where you are.

Vision

- ☐ We can describe how we want the home to live and function.
- ☐ We have identified our highest priorities and non-negotiables.
- ☐ We have discussed the architectural direction and overall character we want.

Property

- ☐ We own the property, have it under contract, or know what we are looking for.
- ☐ We have reviewed the survey, easements, setbacks, access, utilities, and major site conditions.
- ☐ We have considered builder/design-team input before relying on the site for a final design.

Team

- ☐ We understand which professionals the project will require.
- ☐ We have selected or are interviewing an architect and builder.
- ☐ We have discussed how the builder and design team will collaborate.

Budget

- ☐ We have a realistic investment range, not just a target cost per square foot.
- ☐ We understand that site work, selections, specialty systems, and outdoor improvements can materially affect cost.
- ☐ We have discussed contingency and what remains undecided.

Process

- ☐ We understand what preconstruction will include.
- ☐ We know how selections and owner decisions will be tracked.
- ☐ We know how communication, changes, budget updates, and schedule updates will be handled.
- ☐ We understand the next step.

Where Do You Go From Here?

If you are early in the process, you do not need to have every answer before talking with a builder. In fact, an early conversation can often help you understand which answers matter most.

If you already own land, the next step may be a site review. If you are working with an architect, it may be time to bring construction input into the design process. If you are still researching, continue learning until you feel confident enough to begin assembling the team.

The important thing is not moving fast. It is moving with better information.

Better homes begin with better decisions.

BEGIN A CONVERSATION

Whether you already own the property, are evaluating land, are working with an architect, or are simply beginning to explore the possibilities, Luxury Homes of Texas would be glad to learn more about what you are planning.

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