

Six by Roberts

Master builder Craig Roberts displays the handiwork of a lifelong ambition: designing peoples' dream homes.

by Suzanne Ashurst • Photos by Leigh Brown

The Springhill home of Mr. Charles and the late Nan Arendall. An Italian Renaissance design, built by contractor Bill Cherry.

Renaissance grandeur is trumpeted by the pilastered, symmetrical front facade of this recent addition to the Mobile Country Club area of Springhill. Porch and balcony balustrades are cast limestone. The slate roof is one of only two such roofs built in the Mobile area since World War II. The second floor gold-leafed iron gates and gable entablature were acquired by the late Mrs. Arendall at an English estate sale over 25 years ago, and she commissioned Roberts to design the house around this unique element.



Roberts, shown standing at the base of the portico columns at the rear of the Arendall home, incorporated 12-foot sheets of glass on both levels to provide a full view of the tennis courts of the Country Club of Mobile. Tennis was one of Mrs. Arendall's keenest interests, and the courtside view was a governing consideration in site selection and design.

"Mother had built several homes as well as a tennis club at Point Clear; building was just one of her loves," says daughter Boone McGinnley. She admired and adored Craig, and he worked around her bad days [of illness] and gave her something to look forward to on her good ones. She was able to live in her beautiful new home for exactly one year before she passed away. This home will always hold a special meaning for us now."



Chances are that you have already seen some of his work, because architect L. Craig Roberts has earned a reputation as both one of the area's most respected and most prolific residential architects. His hefty portfolio now includes over 80 projects in Mobile and Baldwin counties, including 36 new homes and over 40 home renovations, as well as a handful of impressive commercial projects, such as the ballroom for the Grand Hotel.

Roberts, 41, grew up in Birmingham, but his architectural practice was built in Mobile. He moved here after graduating from Auburn in 1975.

His first work in his new hometown, a den addition, was featured in *Southern Living*, and his reputation has been growing ever since.

A self-described "control addict," his discipline is reflected in both the volume and quality of his work. He is articulate, meticulous, finds time to get involved in community projects, and he's swimming in success.

Contractor Bill Cherry, who has worked with Roberts on a number of projects, says "Craig has the exceptional quality of operating from both sides of the brain. He amazes me with his ability to be both detail and practical oriented, while at the same time contain an overwhelming dimension of creativity. He is genuinely loyal, and he is great listener. But he is also extremely concerned with doing every single thing 'properly.'"

This month we tour six bay area homes designed by Roberts, from west Mobile to Springhill to the Eastern Shore.



French Eclectic: the west Mobile home of Dr. and Mrs. F. Thomas Boudreau III. The contractor was Mike Maddox of C.M. Maddox Construction Co.

Country manor homes were the favorite of the Dr. and Mrs. F. Thomas Boudreau III. An asymmetrical floor plan creates the signature multiple roof lines typical of the manor house. Also representative of the style are the sand finished tinted stucco exterior and the casement windows of varying sizes. A hillside in west Mobile provides an appropriate environment for the steep pitched roof and the grand cast-stone entrance on the second level.

The Boudreaus' entrance foyer achieves the same vertical line as the exterior with its vaulting twenty-foot ceiling. The foyer floor is Alabama white marble and the paneled heart pine front doors were built by Mrs. Boudreau's father, Mr. Robert Slaton, from wooden beams found in an old cotton gin in Tallassee, Ala.



In life, as with most of his projects, Craig Roberts seemed to know what he wanted from the start.

"When I was only six years old I announced that I wanted to design peoples' dream houses," he says, "and when I was twelve I drew up a set of plans. Since my father was a general contractor,

building schools and government buildings, I was exposed to the processes at an early age, and soon the creative element of design became clearly appealing to me. I've always loved to drive through beautiful residential neighborhoods and just absorb their esthetic messages. Still today, we often take drives with clients to

see houses that they have admired or to discover new ideas."

The trick to period replication, says Roberts, is "attaining the correct proportions and understanding the elements of design of that style.

It's important that clients have a guid-
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Waterfront classical revival: The bayside home of Dr. and Mrs. Larry Arcement. Constructed by John E. Pate of J.F. Pate and Associates.

Caribbean influences infuse this vivid rose stucco home accented with seagreen shutters and casement windows trimmed crisp white, atop a red Eastern Shore bluff overlooking Mobile Bay.

The grand gabled portico supported by four twenty-foot ionic columns frames an intricate, ribbon-patterned leaded glass entrance. Assisting in the entrance design was daughter Ashley Arcement, a New York Ford Agency model.

Italy on the hill: The Springhill home of Dr. and Mrs. Adrien Bodet III, built by Frank Hudson of Hudson Engineering.

The Bodet residence exemplifies the Italianate style in authentic detail. Their inspiration began with their admiration of the historic Horst home downtown (later Bernard's Restaurant), built in 1867. The windows and doors of their Springhill home were designed by Roberts and custom built of mahogany by Coastal Door & Window Co. of Mobile. The cast iron porch railings are an old Mobile style called "Pontalba," cast by Lawler Foundry in Birmingham, and fabricated locally by Garris Ornamental Iron.

"The final designs captured our every vision," says Dr. Bodet. "Craig understands proportion, and his talents stretch beyond design to his disciplined demand of quality and authentic presentation. To have someone of this caliber here in Mobile has certainly made an impact on the quality of residential design."





A Country French Eclectic: The Springhill home of Mr. and Mrs. Dwain G. Luce, built by Jacques Pate of J.F. Pate and Associates.

The warmth and charm of the country French style can be read in such elements as the low slung cedar shake roof, the wood-mold brick, bracketed porch columns, and stained wood. The natural flagstone courtyard floor and brick porch floors create complimentary textures and colors for this extension of outdoor living and entertaining space. Dwain Luce traveled with Roberts to Louisiana cajun country to find antique cypress beams used in the exterior doors and interior paneling and cabinets.

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A Work in Progress: The Fairhope home of Dr. and Mrs. Hollis Wiseman. Built by Adrian Johnson, Adrian L. Johnson Inc.

The Wisemans recently replaced their simple get-away cabin retreat with this contemporary sculptural stucco and glass home atop a bluff overlooking the bay. Clad window frames and a design that entails no exterior painted surfaces cut down on maintenance. The wrap around open floor plan provides vast expanses of glass for full views of the bay.

"Craig was able to maximize the views of the bay by designing something we would have never thought," says Dr. Wiseman. "His designs omitted certain view-obstructing interior walls. Instead, he used interior windows that open up the living spaces to the out-of-doors, while maintaining privacy."

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ing ideal of what they want, says Roberts, but on the other hand, they need not show up at the doorstep burdened with details. "People think that they have to come to me with all this wealth of information, when all they really need to do is explain to me what feels good to them, what they like. And then we talk about the square footage they need, their budget, their lifestyle, the children, the day-to-day functions of the home."

After one or two meetings with his clients, Roberts says he begins his design drawings, after which he works with his technical coordinator, Henry L. Nunnam, Sr. "Henry and I have worked together for over ten years. We team up to produce the 30-40 sheets of construction drawings required for each of the homes. The two of us are able to carry the average of three homes I design per year, and anywhere from one to two renovations or additions as well."

Roberts' office is his home, which falls in the modest range compared to some of his client work: "a very simple renovated ranch style home that suits my lifestyle for now. It allows me the freedom to travel and offers me a low business overhead. I do plan to design something for myself one day, but it will be quite different from the things I have designed for others. I plan to do a rustic contemporary nestled in a private wooded property, integrated in the natural surroundings. I have long been an admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright and his dedication to simple proportions, the idea that contemporary design is a sculpture to be lived in. The plan for the exterior becomes the envelope for the interior design."

Suzanne Ashurst is lifestyles editor of Mobile Bay Monthly.