

Home Style

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Simply beautiful:

CONTEMPORARY MANSION ON THE WESTERN SHORE

BY KATHY DEAN

Concrete. Granite. Steel. The words conjure up an image of something harsh, something cold, something lifeless. Put these materials in the hands of residential architect L. Craig Roberts of Mobile, and something magical happens. In his latest creation, a stunning contemporary mansion in Riverview Nursery Estates, these materials combine to create a home that is stunning in its design, yet warm and comfortable for a family with children.



"The owners wanted something different," Roberts said of the exquisite waterfront home built by Bill Cherry. "It's contemporary, but not stark. I wanted this to have a warm feeling, so that the textures of the house match the texture of the surroundings."

Roberts accomplished this goal with clean, contemporary lines throughout the home, which includes 6,400 square feet heated and cooled with another 2,000 in garage and porches. The exterior incorporates stucco walls, copper-covered eaves and a concrete-tiled roof designed to resemble wooden shakes.

Inside, the breathtaking waterfront view provides the primary "artwork" on the walls. The home features pickled oak floors and cabinets, and stucco-covered concrete columns. A fireplace surrounded by polished black granite soars in an angle toward the 35-foot ceiling, and a handmade, polished stainless steel balustrade leads to the second floor balcony with a sitting area. Everywhere the eye rests, it is treated to a beautiful scene.

The first scene that greets the visitor is a magnificent sunset view of water, trees and grasses. Two-story windows frame the view, uncluttered by drapes. A circular dining room features a nook designed specifically for a sideboard. Off the foyer, a contemporary lavatory with a blue glass bowl and glass tabletop perched on a chrome cone pedestal livens up the powder room.

In the kitchen, granite countertops and stainless steel appliances meld with pickled oak cabinets to create a warm, welcoming area. Off the kitchen is a playroom, followed by an exercise room.



Beyond the greatroom is the master suite, with a private balcony overlooking the river. The massive closet and master bath include a separate vanity with granite countertop. Upstairs, a hallway widens into a sitting area overlooking the greatroom. Children's rooms have bright blue and yellow built-in cabinets and red cubbyholes, and a guest bedroom features a private balcony. A mother-in-law suite with kitchenette over the three-car garage provides additional room for guests. Dramatic lighting, clean lines and uncluttered views make this home an oasis of calm in a busy world.

"Most people think of me as a traditionalist," added Roberts, a member of the American Institute of Architects and an Auburn University graduate who has designed upscale homes in the Mobile area for more than 20 years. "With a traditional home, you want to replicate a period or style with the proper details and proportions. You usually know what it will look like on the outside, and the challenge is to make the inside fit today's lifestyles.

"It's different with contemporary design – you begin on the inside and work out. The floor plan must reflect the views, needs and desires of the owners and how they want to live. You draw the plan first and then wrap it in the exterior, which becomes a sculpture. Really, you are creating our own original sculpture for someone to live in," he said.

It's one thing to envision and

design a contemporary home that breaks all the molds – it's quite another to convey that concept with a flat, one-dimensional architectural drawing. For this home, Roberts asked Tulane University architecture student and intern Vivien Yu to turn the drawings into a three-dimensional model.

Roberts builds two to three homes per year, hand-drawing all blueprints and overseeing details down to the towel hooks in the bathroom. A design can take six to eight months to complete, with more than 30 pages of construction



drawings. He spends long hours with the owners, discussing their wants and needs, taking pictures and measurements of the furniture they plan to keep in their new home, and leading them through the often daunting process of construction. High-end upscale homes in the Mobile area can average \$150 to \$170 per square foot and up.

Roberts said the simplicity of contemporary design has its own special challenges.

"People think that because a contemporary design looks so simple, that it's simple to build. It's just the opposite – everything has to be perfect. The lines must meet precisely -- there are no moldings to hide imperfections," Roberts explained.

The result is simply beautiful. ♦