



BY
WILLIAM
KISSEL
ILLUSTRATION BY
MICHAEL
KOELSCH

If creating your dream home requires drastic measures, don't worry — these **LUXURY-HOME BUILDERS** are here to indulge you.

HOUSE OF EXTREMES

WHEN A DESIGNER and his wife wanted to build their dream house on the oceanfront Florida lot where their current home sat, they didn't relish the inconvenience of packing and moving into temporary housing while their property was under construction. So they asked their contractor, Steve Paskoski of Fort Lauderdale, if he could figure out a way to build the new 12,000-square-foot house "around and over" the existing 3,000-square-foot structure so they wouldn't have to move.

"It essentially looked like an egg inside a box; it was an incredible challenge," recalls Paskoski, one of the country's leading high-end residential home builders. "Once we had the new house built over and above, we took the roof off of the existing house and ran the walls up 5 or 6 feet — ultimately connecting it spaceshiplike to the floor of the hovering structure — so you would never know it was two homes at one time," says the big-ticket contractor, adding that such unusual requests are no longer an anomaly but the new



THE CHALLENGE OF LUXURY-HOME BUILDING IS OFTEN, QUITE LITERALLY, AN UPHILL BATTLE.

norm in luxury-home building.

These days, affluent home builders are looking well beyond en suite bathrooms, the ubiquitous kitchen built for a chef, a wood-paneled library with a safe room and a climate-controlled wine cellar. Many are going to architectural extremes to create the house of their dreams. Moreover, some are bypassing the conventional architect or interior designer and taking their demands directly to the source — high-end residential contractors such as Taconic Builders, Angles Construction and Grunow Construction, who control and manage the work from blueprints to final walk-throughs.

"When homeowners start researching architects like Robert A. M. Stern, Boris Baranovich or Peter Marino, they see that Taconic was used as the contractor and sometimes they call us directly," offers



FROM TOP: In order to build this 10,000-square-foot estate along the oceanfront in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, the homeowners had to give eight of their original 12 acres of property to the national preservation trust.

the multimillion-dollar price tags for all of these homes, even wealthy homeowners have a budget, Tyer says.

What's more, the companies that build these homes don't

rest when the job is completed. "We have a whole department that maintains the project, right down to hanging up the Christmas decorations after we leave," he explains.

Among the more extravagant requests, builders say, are moats around oceanfront estates, gravity-defying sunrooms off of Manhattan skyscrapers, underground

company president Vince Tyer. These builders go far beyond the constraints of typical contractors, employing their own teams of highly skilled craftsmen — from framers, stone masons, plasterers, mill workers and painters to electricians and plumbers — to get the work completed properly, on time and, most importantly, on budget. Despite

entertainment spaces and great estates built on largely inaccessible landscapes. One homebuilder in Rolling Hills, California, made news recently for constructing five stories — including nine lavish bedrooms, a Moroccan-style Turkish bath and even a tennis court — all underground to stay within the single-story home parameters dictated by the city, designed to not obstruct the ocean views.

However, few can match the hoops Taconic went through to have one Manhattan couple's Hamptons beach house constructed during the winter so it would be livable in time for summer. "Because of the family's desire to be in the residence by Memorial Day, we had to come up with a scheme so that weather wouldn't affect the building schedule," Tyer says. To accomplish the task, the Mamaroneck, New York-based builder acquired a massive pressurized dome once used to house four tennis courts at a private country club in Virginia and had it installed around the perimeter of the foundation of one of the beachfront property's two 14,000-square-foot houses to provide protective cover for the build. "We had the bubble modified to fit the site, then we were able to inflate it with heaters and lights so we could build in a conditioned space through the winter," says Tyer, noting that the dome was constructed

MANY ARE GOING TO ARCHITECTURAL EXTREMES TO CREATE THE HOUSE OF THEIR DREAMS.

like a garage with an air-lock door system so that vehicles carrying supplies could go in and out without deflating the tent and exposing the job site to the outside elements.

More recently, the same company painstakingly constructed a subterranean indoor swimming pool by burrowing under mountains of rock and soil extracted from the former low-ceilinged basement of a 19th-century Manhattan brownstone. And



FROM TOP: This Long Island Sound waterfront estate in Rye, New York (shown finished above and as a work in progress at left), proved especially challenging for Taconic Builders because of the small amount of property on the leeward side of the house; workers and subcontractors had to park half a mile away and be ferried to the job site in vans.

in supersized septic systems on steep slopes — especially in winter

on yet another project, Taconic was called upon to convert a New York penthouse balcony into a glass-enclosed breakfast room, a process that required the construction crew to build cantilevered scaffolding high above the city to accommodate the massive, dangling sheets of glass.

For Scott Wallace, the residential division manager of Agsten Construction, one of the few contractors sanctioned by the Greenbrier architectural review board to build at the exclusive West Virginia sporting club, the challenge of luxury-home building is often, quite literally, an uphill battle. "One of our biggest challenges is building up the side of Greenbrier Mountain, where you typically have a very small area to maneuver," says Wallace, a nine-year veteran of the Charleston, West Virginia-based construction firm. Building large-scale foundations and moving rains and snowy conditions — requires ingenuity and a serious can-do attitude.

"We're no stranger to tempting projects," adds Wallace, noting some of the homes he has built slope-side at Greenbrier are as large as 12,000 square feet. "We start by building retaining walls and leveling up the ground just to build a driveway to get to the building site," he says. Because of Greenbrier's strict building regulations, Wallace says the homesites typically have a limited building envelope "to take advantage of the views and still hide the house from sight." What's more, Greenbrier regulations prevent contractors from using man-made materials — such as lightweight, manufactured wood; lick-and-stick cast stone and veneers; or cement-fiber trims and moldings — designed to make the job easier.

Meanwhile, Paskoski went to great heights, literally, to create a

MASTER BUILDERS

Looking for an extreme home builder? Here are a handful of companies to get you started.

Agsten Construction

Charleston, West Virginia
Agsten works in and around the state but primarily focuses on luxury homes within Greenbrier County. www.agstenconstruction.com

Grunow Construction

La Jolla, California
Grunow specializes in historic preservation of existing luxury homes, as well as custom home remodels and new home construction. www.grunowconstruction.com

Malone Construction

Atlanta
Builds both classic and modern high-end residential homes in some of the South's most prestigious neighborhoods. One of its masterpieces includes The Prado, a modern structural steel-and-stone veneer residence featuring an oversized Palladian-style colonnade entrance and dramatic circular staircase. www.maloneconstruction.com

20,000-square-foot home at St. Andrews Country Club in Boca Raton, Florida, for Bernie Marcus, the co-founder of Home Depot. "The homeowner saw this picture of a honeycomb in a magazine and wanted it recreated in the house," says Paskoski, who, in the tradition of Addison Mizner, handcrafted the spectacular ceiling design out of 300-year-old pecky cypress 25 feet above the home's expansive family room. Paskoski also installed a pneumatic glass-cylinder elevator — like those once used in offices and banks to transport documents across the room — to carry Marcus up to his in-home loft office. "He didn't want an elevator because he's very fit and athletic for a man over 80. But I convinced him that he would never go to the office after the first time if we didn't put something like this in," recalls Paskoski. The lakefront estate was later voted "house of the year" by the Construction Association of South Florida and helped establish Paskoski as one of the top 500 residential contractors in the U.S. by *Qualified Remodelers* magazine.

ALTHOUGH SOME OF the United States' top home builders have worked abroad creating second and even third residences for their clients, most of the work is regional due to the constraints of labor. "We're looking at a project right now in Mumbai; it's a luxury residential tower, and we're looking at doing one of the residences," says Taconic's Tyer. "We're also looking at one in Antigua. But the challenge of working out of the country is sourcing materials to the site, and finding subcontractors, particularly finish contractors, who can achieve the level of finish work we're used to delivering. So on any of these projects abroad, it has sort of been part of the upfront strategy — and cost — to have a U.S. contractor with U.S. resources, so they know they will achieve the level of finish they are trying to get," he says.

For Paskoski, just getting a house built across the country posed its own sort of challenges. "We just finished a 10,000-square-foot oceanfront estate in



LEFT: Originally slated as a modest addition/renovation, this Taconic project in Weston, Connecticut, turned into a 14,000-square-foot estate with a movie theater, tennis courts, a pool, a spa and a billiards room. **BELOW:** A home at The Greenbrier Sporting Club in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

Michael Davis Design & Construction

Sagaponack, New York
The company builds luxury residential spec houses, including a \$25.95 million house in The Hamptons that welcomed more than 75 potential buyers to its open house. www.michaeldavis.com

Paskoski Construction

Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Paskoski specializes in large-scale luxury residences in the southeast, primarily in Coral Gables and Boca Raton, Florida. www.paskoskiconstruction.com

Sizebreed Construction

London
Its main focus is on building luxury residential properties in London and Southern England; specializes in complicated structural work, as well as refurbishment, conservation and restoration. It also offers a bespoke maintenance service after the job is done to ensure proper care of everything. www.sizebreed.com

Taconic Builders

Mamaroneck, New York
Taconic has a heavy concentration of luxury residential properties in Manhattan. However, the firm recently began to expand outside of the state with projects in California, Connecticut and England, among other locations. www.taconicbuilders.com



Cape Cod, Massachusetts. I'm in Fort Lauderdale, so that was interesting, supervising a job that far away," he says. "We built a house for this couple down here, and they wanted someone they could trust in Massachusetts, so they hired us. I hired some local trades for the mechanicals, but for the finish trades, I had people drive up from Florida and had to put them up from week to week in order to complete the project." The job ended up being an uphill battle for both contractor and homeowner. "The homeowner originally bought 12 acres, and he was forced to give eight of those acres to the national preservation trust just for the privilege of building on the oceanfront property," says Paskoski.

Paskoski's current project in Coral Gables, Florida, though, is among his most complex. "When we started, it was 80 pages of drawings and now we're up to 400," he says of the future 17,000-square-foot home. "Every time we turn around, the homeowners and their architects are growing the project. But when it's done, it will be one of the most unique homes ever built."

A bold statement, to be sure, for someone who has built some of America's most spectacular estates. ■

WILLIAM KISSEL writes about luxury fashion, architecture and interior design. His work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Robb Report* and *Virtuoso Life*, among other publications.