

# Custom Home

The Art and Craft of Custom Home Building / July/August 2012

## Stone Soul

Built from salvaged local materials,  
a working farmhouse feeds the body and spirit.

2012 Pacesetter Awards

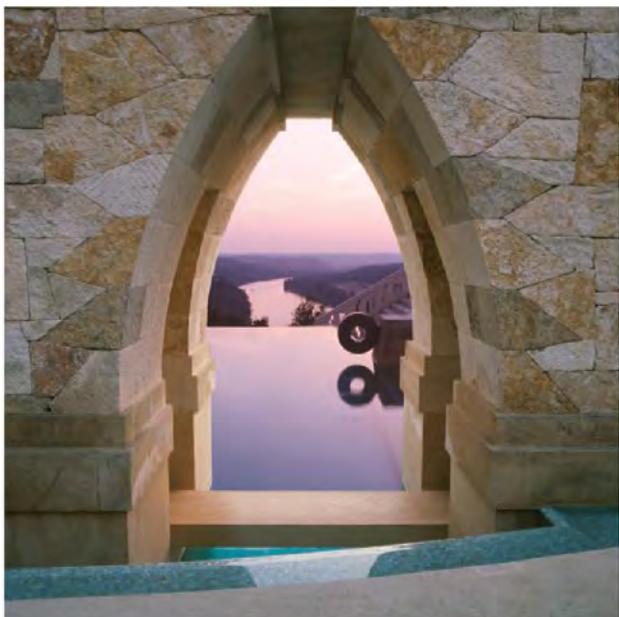


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# Classic Craftsmen

*F*ew jobs designed by top-notch architects are easy to accomplish. Both modern and traditional houses have their challenges. But the greatest source of difficulty comes from the nature of custom building itself—that it's all prototype execution, a new learning curve with each project. Still, some will say that modern work is the least forgiving because there's no trim to hide a miscalculation. Perhaps there's an element of truth in that. But classical houses certainly strain nearly every participating trade simply by dint of the amount of design per square inch that must be built and installed. For this year's Pacesetter awards, we went looking for the best builders of American's best-loved aesthetic. Our picks aren't satisfied covering up a mistake with molding—they insist on getting everything right from the start. Because they're not building for fashion's sake; they're building to stand the test of time and taste.

By Bruce D. Snider and Meghan Drueding



# David Escobedo

Construction doesn't get any more essential than stacking stones, or any more advanced than CNC fabrication. David Escobedo's work bridges those two extremes, applying up-to-the-minute technology to support an ancient way of building. A lifelong student of traditional masonry, Escobedo has read and traveled widely, learning from masters of the trade, both living and long dead. In recent years, he has updated their techniques with sophisticated machinery, gaining efficiency and cutting costs while remaining true to the timeless values of his craft.

Based near Austin, Texas, Escobedo's company is a full-service general contractor with impressive capabilities in all phases of residential construction. "We have 36,000 square feet of space—between wood, stone, and steel—in three separate buildings," Escobedo says. "And we're CNC [equipped] in all three disciplines." The company performs all of its own steel fabrication and carpentry, on houses that often top 20,000 square feet and typically take three years to build. But the company's reputation is written—if you will—in stone, a material whose potential Escobedo exploits in all its dimensions: structural, cultural, and aesthetic. "It's not just a veneer on the wall," he explains. "We've been able to do true load-bearing masonry. I've done one mitered cor-

ner—only out of necessity—in 25 years."

That dedication to authenticity shows in projects like the Mayan House, in preparation for which Escobedo traveled to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula to study the 1,000-year-old stonework of the Palenque ruins. Like much of Escobedo's work, the Mayan House's limestone walls are laid dry, without mortar. "So the precision really has to be there to get the fit," he explains.

Once, Escobedo's masons would have executed the house's finely carved stone columns and elaborate details entirely by hand. Now the company uses computer-controlled milling machinery to speed through the rough work, saving its skilled labor for the final carving. "Michelangelo, his CNC was the 20 [apprentices] he had beating on the stone until he was ready to go to work on it," Escobedo says. "What we're doing with the machinery is speeding up the process, but we've kept the old-world technique."—*B.D.S.*

Escobedo Construction  
/ Buda, Texas / [www.escobedoconstruction.com](http://www.escobedoconstruction.com) / Years in business: 25 / Employees: 80 / 2011 volume: \$15 million / 2011 starts: 2 houses, 11 smaller projects

David Escobedo's expertise in stone masonry shows in the Mayan House, designed by Paul Lamb Architects (opposite page). His Penthouse project, designed by Webber + Studio, brings the same level of craft to an apartment setting.

