



Art in Architecture

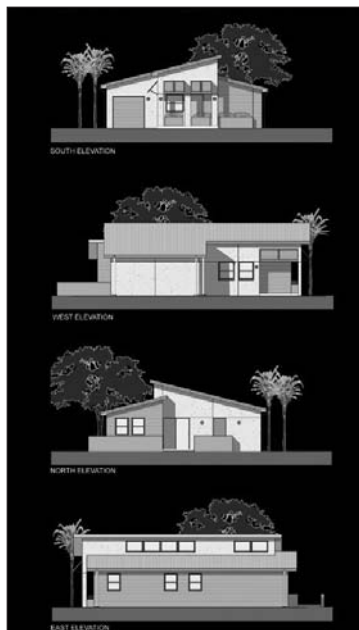


The National Association of Realtors, in convention in Orlando in November, has planned a tour of the “Art in Architecture” homes and a seminar to promote the use of the concept with the hope that other Realtor associations around the nation will institute an Art in Architecture program in their communities.

The Florida Housing Coalition had an interview with Art in Architecture’s founder, Realtor, Steve Chitwood and Architect, John Erhig, FAIA.

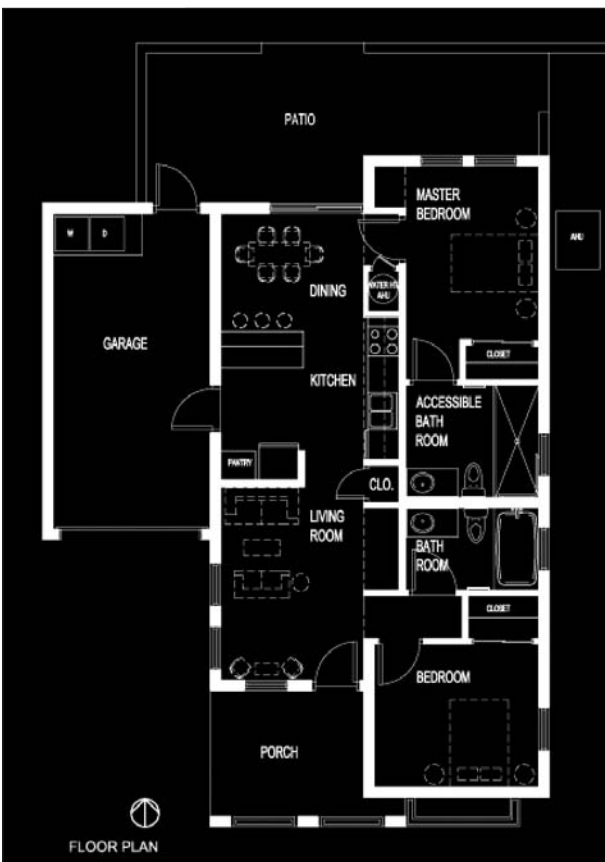
FHC: WHAT IS ART IN ARCHITECTURE AND HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

CHITWOOD: Art in Architecture is a program designed to promote good architecture and unique design at an affordable price, as well as an effort to combat NIMBYism. As a member of the Orlando Regional Realtors Association’s Board of Directors, I proposed that we do something pro-active to support affordable housing, a growing problem in the Orlando area, which has a high percentage of lower paid workers employed in the service and hospitality centers. The ORRA Board



approved the program unanimously and provided \$60,000 to purchase four lots in the Holden Heights area, near downtown Orlando.

The concept was to showcase four homes with new and creative designs that would provide architecturally significant change to the standard concrete block box, which we have often seen as affordable housing. The designs would be such that they could be built using currently available and cost effective materials, for a total price that was within the range of affordability for those residents whose incomes were no more than 80 percent of the Orlando area median family income. The four houses were designed by AIA architects, built by members of the Metro Orlando Homebuilders Association,



decorated by members of the local interior design community and sold by members of the Orlando Regional Realtors Association.

FHC: How Did You Get Architects on Board?

CHITWOOD: I contacted John Erhig of the local AIA chapter and asked him if his organization would be willing to donate their architectural services by providing four new and unique home designs as a donation to the program. John enthusiastically contacted four well-know architects and they all committed to the program, donating their time and expertise.

FHC: How Did You Get The Builders on Board?

CHITWOOD: I contacted four members of the homebuilders association that were or had been active in the production of affordable housing and they all committed to the program.

FHC: What is the Future For the Art in Architecture Program?

The Orlando Regional Realtors Association has established a 501(c)(3) foundation (The Florida Real Estate Foundation) to continue the Art in Architecture program and promote its growth. The funds initially supplied to purchase the first four lots will come back to ORRA at the closing on the sale of each of the homes. The board of directors has pledged those funds along with additional funds, and a line of credit, to purchase additional lots and to build more homes for those in the low-to moderate-income ranges.

Affordable housing is a BIG need in Orlando. The Art in Architecture program has promoted the awareness of the affordable housing crisis and has supplied a vehicle for those professional organizations invested in housing, to help solve the problem. The Orlando Regional Realtors Association and its commitment to support affordable



housing supplied the necessary impetus to get the project started. Its agreement to fund the initial lot purchase and to promote the concept gave the program the credibility to move forward. The commitment by its staff and its membership to carry through and expand the program has benefited the Orlando metropolitan area citizens and has helped to place a “spotlight” on the needs of our low-to-moderate income citizens in their search to find a home they can afford. The first four houses are completed and stand as an example of GREAT design and an inspiration for others to produce quality affordable housing and 10 more homes are underway.

FHC: HOW CAN BUILDERS BENEFIT FROM THE ARCHITECT’S WORK IN THE ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM?

CHITWOOD: At this point, the Art in Architecture program has nine different affordable plans that can be used by any builder, for a nominal fee, to produce affordable single-family homes that, for all practical purposes, can be placed almost anywhere within the metro area and which will blend into the neighborhood without looking like an “affordable” home.

We have received many calls and questions concerning the program from outside the Orlando area. ORRA has spent the necessary funds to “package” the program with all of its logos, signage, guidelines, etc., and is making that package

available to the local Boards of Realtors throughout the nation as a program to support affordable housing.

The support from architects, such as Don Evans of The Evans Group, as he rallied his fellow architects and challenged them during the process was wonderful. The willingness of the builders to accept the challenge and agree to build the houses with only a 10 percent supervision fee, the eagerness of the interior designers to accept the challenge of showing what can get done on a limited budget was inspiring. I have been constantly amazed as the willingness of the “building industry” to rally and work to produce these homes.

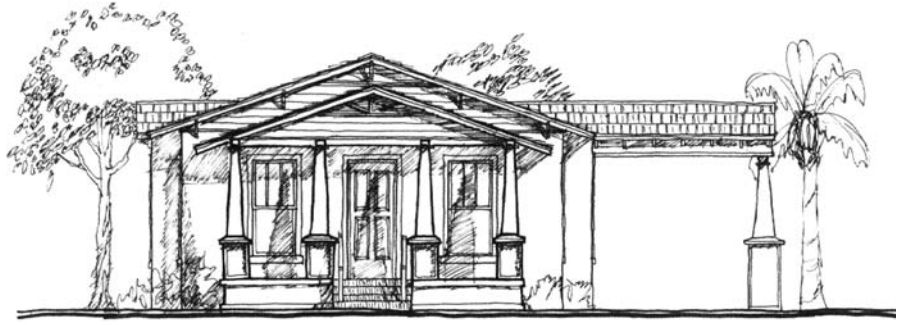
FHC: ONCE STEVE CHITWOOD GOT THE LAND, HE NEEDED ARCHITECTS TO COME UP WITH AFFORDABLE HOUSING DESIGNS. HOW DID THAT WORK?

EHRIG: Steve contacted the AIA Orlando and asked if there would be any interest from the local architects to provide “pro bono” design services to create better looking and well designed housing for a local neighborhood. After a few phone calls, I found four architects to provide the designs. The firms included The Evans Group, Fugleberg Koch Architects, Nasrallah Fine Architectural Design, and a group of young professionals from the Young Architects Forum.

The teams of architects were then paired up with several local builders who agreed to construct the designs on a cost plus basis, with a 10% markup for overhead. The builders included



Steve Chitwood (far right) and Greg Rokeh cut the ribbon with County Commissioner Homer L. Hartage (center).



The Watson Group, Westar Homes and the Dye Companies, Inc. The builders and architects worked side-by-side during the design phase to develop the most cost effective approach to each design, taking into account the individual builders standard construction methods and materials.

FHC: TELL US ABOUT THE DESIGNS.

EHRIG: The homes vary in size from approximately 950 square feet to 1396 square feet. The sale prices ranged from \$105,000 for a two bedroom, two bath unit to \$126,000 for the five bedroom, two and half bath home including a 50 x 135 foot lot. The designs included a variety of approaches from the Neo-traditional to contemporary, each with its own character. The solution from the Young Architects Forum for a two bedroom, two bath empty nester home turned out to be a local favorite.

The largest unit, designed by the Evans Group, has the special feature of being a multi-generational home. The plan provides a separate suite down stairs for grandma and/or grandpa while the upstairs has four bedrooms for mom and dad and the kids.

As the design process evolved, several community groups started working with potential buyers in credit counseling and mortgage qualification. Local banks got involved providing construction funds after the initial funding source had a change of heart. There were also several permitting

issues that had its challenges. But through the efforts of a number of individuals including County Commissioner Homer Hartage issues were solved one by one.

The finishing touch for each home was added by a group of interior designers and decorators who took on the challenge to complete the design with the furniture and finishes that were required. Each had a modest budget of between \$1,500 and \$2,500 to do the whole job. The interiors were completed by Faun Carlson, Sharon De Rousha, Sharon Neace and Cissy Poirer. Through the gracious donation of a local developer, Westgate Resorts, the designers had three warehouses of furniture to pick from. After the grand opening the new home owner could keep all the donated articles.

FHC: DO YOU FEEL THE ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM HAS BEEN A SUCCESS?

EHRIG: You bet. The four homes in Holden Heights were open to the public on Aug. 12, 2004, just one day before Hurricane Charley blew through Orlando. When the clouds cleared and rain ceased the houses were standing tall with no damage. We were truly blessed. The story doesn't end here. Art in Architecture II is well under way in Winter Park and another in Orlando is on the drawing boards. This collaborative effort of hundreds of people was the dream of one man (Steve Chitwood) who had the vision and courage to seek to improve the lives of low income families by providing affordable and beautiful homes is making its way to other parts of America.

