



# Introduction ●●●

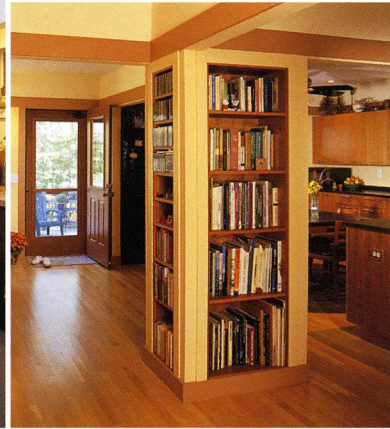
**EVERYBODY WANTS TWO THINGS FOR THEIR HOME:** that it be beautiful and on budget. Most people spend more for the place where they live than any other physical object they will ever own. But compared to almost any other retail transaction, homebuyers usually have the least control over what they get. The result? High stakes purchasing + low expectations = frustrating reality. But this reality is absent from almost all media portrayals, academic exercises, or the tradition of professional home design, where money is assumed to be readily available for great designs.

There are plenty of books on cost meant for builders, developers, and economists (with all the visual appeal of a calculus textbook), and there are unending parades of visually seductive and energizing images of homes on television, in the movies, and in print, but those images have no price tags attached to them. This book breaks down the unspoken barrier between beautiful homes and their budgets. I know of no other book that takes on this disconnect.

To break through 50 years of denial, an extensive search netted hundreds of houses that triumphed over their crisply defined budgets. From that pool, 19 homes were chosen for publication. The criteria for selection were as follows:

- The homes had to be full-time residences built in the last eight years (no renovations). One vacation home was so compelling that we decided to include it.
- The cost of construction of these homes had to be competitive with their spec-built counterparts for their region at the time of their construction. The comparison between spec houses and those in this





book is on a functional basis rather than by size or cost per square foot. Given the custom design of each home, they should “fit” their owner’s needs, so overall size is not a criterion for comparison.

- The homes were not owner built; all had general contractors, or if the owner served as the general contractor, the vast majority of work and materials were purchased for market rate fees.
- Building, site development, and design fee costs were requested from all submitters, and most provided them. Site acquisition costs were not requested as the cost of land is so variable depending on location that any citation would serve more to confuse the reader than to provide useful information.

Books about contemporary architecture seldom, if ever, deal with costs, dates, clients, and levels of architectural service, but these facts are the central issues for anyone thinking about building a house. The inclusion of these data allows readers to get a clear sense that older and/or more rural projects may be viewed in an inordinately positive light and, conversely, the more recent and more urban projects may seem to be at a cost disadvantage to those in different circumstances.

Success in architecture is always subjective, but in this case all the owners and builders who were part of the projects submitted written statements describing their experiences. In every statement there was enthusiastic testimony of the project’s ultimate success—even if there were some bumps in the road. In the end, these are human stories, replete with choices and foibles. A lot like life in general.

