



Riverside Homes







MODERN HOMES FOR URBAN LIFE

In Austin, Texas an urban housing utopia is thriving. Amidst the confusion of the city's complex building codes, Riverside Homes have emerged as specialists in green construction - building modern custom homes in central Austin neighborhoods that reflect the lifestyle of a new breed of home owner.

Scott Turner is an Austinite through and through. Working as a real estate agent in the Austin market since 1996, Turner was exposed to the business of urban construction and development at a young age. A short time later, in 2001, Riverside Homes was born with its first project in what is now one of Austin's most recognizable locations.

"The 78704 zip code is what everyone knows here: It's a part of town that is very desirable, with lots of cool shops and restaurants, but at the time it was really transitioning," Turner said. "The neighborhood was gentrifying, and prices were still affordable." The project required a zoning change and a handful of variances, not an easy task under Austin's complex development code. "Looking back, I'm still not sure how we pulled it off. It would be impossible today."



Boosted by this initial success, Turner and his team continued to move forward with urban infill projects in 78704 neighborhoods like Bouldin, Zilker and Travis Heights, offering access to the quality of life that Austin is famous for. Zilker Park, on Lady Bird Lake, offers festivals, paddle boarding and miles of hike and bike trails right in the middle of town, and nearby Barton Springs features

water that is 72 degrees year round to counter the Texas heat. Despite the proximity to Downtown, many of Riverside's clients work from home or reverse commute to work. More than convenience, they want a modern home to complement their urban lifestyle.

“We’d find a vacant lot and build on it, then another, and another,” he said. “Early on, I

was simultaneously working as a real estate agent, and I opened my brokerage, Turner Residential, in 2003 while continuing to build houses along the way.” This market-based perspective proved to be invaluable to Turner during the downturn. “Because of the brokerage, I’m a little more in tune with market conditions, particularly in urban neighborhoods. When the market began to tighten in 2007, we made the decision to stick with homes priced near the conforming loan limit of \$417,000. Our clients wanted the urban lifestyle and could still qualify for a good mortgage.”

Before long, Riverside Homes knew they had found their calling. Now, the company tackles 10-12 houses a year that range in size and scope, exclusively in urban Austin. “After the downturn, we were positioned to take on larger, multi-unit projects, opportunities that brought us to where we are today,” Turner said. “We’re averaging \$700,000 to \$900,000 per unit with a variety of products and price points, appealing to families, empty nesters, and even first time buyers.”

After the early days of his high risk, high reward baptism of fire in Austin real estate, his



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business has evolved every step of the way – obtaining a wealth and depth of knowledge that would prove incredibly valuable in the long run.

COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Refusing to be a one-size-fits-all home builder, the multi-faceted team – made up of 10 real estate agents that work for the brokerage, two project managers and a couple of directors – wears different hats, and cooperation is paramount. In the complex, fast-paced world of Austin real estate, that's crucial in growing the brand and maintaining their reputation for quality.

“We have one of the most restrictive urban zoning codes in the nation,” Turner said. “Austin’s McMansion Ordinance limits the size and configuration of every home we build, down to exacting detail.” Large trees, protected by city ordinance, cannot be removed, so homes must be designed and built around them. Not surprising, given Austin’s tree-hugging reputation. Due to the complexity, every project is unique, with its own set of challenges. It takes both knowledge and patience to deal with the myriad and often conflicting local building codes on a day to day basis.

EXPERIENCE AND INTENT

In addition to their expertise, Riverside Homes is also known for their keen design sensibility. Their modern style, clean lines and attention to detail have set them apart from other builders in the Austin area. To maintain their integrity, character and craftsmanship, Turner remains shrewd on where



he chooses to take his team and his business, sticking to their urban roots

“Lot supply will always be a challenge. Urban infill is a niche business.” Turner states. “It would be very difficult for us to go from 10 homes a year to 50 homes without making significant changes to our business plan or the areas in which we build,” he said. “I’d

have to go further out to find more lots, and that's a different market. So we stick with what we know, what we're familiar with, and that's urban Austin."

"Our size keeps us nimble, allowing us to take opportunities when we find them. Sometimes, that's a smaller project, such as



the tiny homes we just finished in East Austin." A cluster of new homes that averaged less than 1250 sf, they were snapped up in Austin's hot real estate market.

The market for a similar product in a different neighbourhood, however, can vary dramatically. "We're building similar size homes elsewhere, but the price point is \$200,000

higher, just based on where they are it is," he continued. "The land really drives the value in urban environments."

"We're more of a design-build firm in practice," he continued. "Because there are so many limits on what we can build and how it's configured, we often design and build homes ourselves before putting them on the market," Turner said. "With our custom clients, we're very involved in the design process. This is out of experience and intent. Thoughtful design is our trademark, so we put function first when thinking about the floor plans, and we know more about the building codes than most architects. We've found that a collaborative effort between the client, the architect and the builder yields the best results."

HGTV SMART HOME 2015

Blending green design with style and function, Riverside Homes' commitment to environmentally friendly living comes standard. Their participation in the Austin Energy Green Building Program means that every home includes a variety of features and systems designed to work together to create a more energy efficient, healthy and environmentally friendly place to live. "The average

home in the US leaks as much air as a window left open all the time,” Turner says, “Closing this “window” forms the foundation of a high performance, green built home.” Their reputation for building green was personified when the first of six houses they are building in the Zilker neighbourhood was chosen as the HGTV Smart Home 2015.

“When HGTV came on board, they were pleasantly surprised to see that a lot of the green building features that they usually have to upgrade or ask the builder to accommodate, we do as a standard,” Turner said. “All of our homes have the same environmentally friendly and energy efficient features as the HGTV Smart Home 2015.”

As members of the Austin Energy Green Builder Program, all of their homes are independently rated by the program. The 2300 square foot HGTV Smart Home 2015 was no different. Earning four out of five stars, the home is one of the most energy efficient in Austin, but there are some features in the home that aren’t so standard.

For example, the garage door opener texts you when you forget to close it, a bathroom window turns opaque with the touch of a



button for privacy, and almost everything – lighting, blinds, even skylights - can be controlled by an app. “One of the smartest features in the house has to do with the internet of things,” Turner said. “Devices that are directly connected to each other via a wireless network.”

”The Nest thermostat learns the owner’s usage patterns, when you are home and when you aren’t, and adjusts itself accordingly. In the HGTV Smart Home 2015, the washer connects to the Nest and accesses the user data,” he continued. “So it can tell when you’re not home and turns itself on to run a load of laundry while you’re away. That level of connectivity and convenience is the future



of smart home technology.”

BUILDING A REPUTATION

In 14 years, Riverside Homes has become more than just a modern home builder in Austin. Driven by a sensibility that mixes and mashes avenues from design, culture and the environment, they’ve embraced a philosophy that mirrors that of the city they call home – laid back and low key.

“We’ll be building in the same neighborhoods for years to come, so our reputation is very important,” Turner said. “We get to know our neighbors, many of whom have been there for longer than we’ve been in business. We respect that, and work hard to

minimize the disruptions that our work can cause. We believe that good relationships and good communication are the hallmarks of any good business.”

Their reputation and successful track record have become a blessing for Riverside Homes. In a position of privilege thanks to their brand identity in the market, based on the quality of their homes, the company is enjoying a mix of both larger projects and custom business. “We’re at a point where we can consistently deliver a high quality product without overextending.”

Measured expansion remains an important objective in the coming years for Riverside Homes, but for Turner, he understands and underscores the importance real estate’s cardinal rule of location, location, location.

“It drives our market,” he says. “Texas is a big state, but, even in Austin, you don’t see much of the walkable lifestyle that’s found in urban areas around the country. We’re bringing people back to Austin’s urban core by building modern, healthy, energy efficient homes in great neighborhoods, places with amenities you can’t find anywhere else. It sounds simple, but quality of life is why we’re in business.”

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