

Fairfield County HBRA Hosts Beyond the Blueprint

A Panel of HOBI Winning Builders Discuss Today's Challenges & Trends



L-R Diane Ramirez, Julio DiBiase, Darren Andreoli, Bob Sprouls, Paul Harris, Chris Pagliaro & Fairfield County HBRA EO, Jackie Bertolone

On March 6th at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center's spectacular new Farmhouse events space, 160 turned out to hear four HOBI Award winning builders and a HOBI winning architect discuss the challenges they faced in building their outstanding custom homes, and the trends they are seeing in the luxury market. CTC&G was the media sponsor for the event, and photographed it for their upcoming issue.

Panel moderator, Diane Ramirez, CEO of Halstead Real Estate, provided opening remarks on the high end market.



"For the past two and one-half years, the luxury housing market has been very hesitant. The annual price appreciation that had been occurring for years was not sustainable. Today's buyer wants to see 'value'... At any price level, a builder must give home-buyers the feeling that they have come out ahead."

– Diane Ramirez, Halstead Real Estate

Architect & developer, Paul Harris, Cole Harris Associates, won Project of the Year for a development of two \$7 million + spec homes on Brush Island Road, Darien. It took just 14 months to build both homes, two docks & install all landscaping.

In April, Paul sold the larger of the two homes, an elegant farmhouse at 21 Brush Island for \$7.4 million, just 5 percent under the asking price.



"I've been building since 2004, and designing homes since 1991. The spec market starts with location. A prime location lends itself to both empty nesters and millennials. For our Project of the Year in Darien, the homes had 400 ft and 600 ft of shoreline, and the goal was exclusivity for each house. With that in mind, we spent \$30,000 to save two 76" and 96" diameter beech trees, and we used a non toxic plant based mist system with 150 heads scattered throughout the property for bug and pest control."

Paul Harris started using stagers for his spec homes about 5-6 years ago. He explained, "We haven't used the same stager twice... not because I haven't been happy with the stager, but because I try to find the right stager for each house."

Paul chose Leia Ward, LTW Design for 17 Brush Island Road. "It was the more rustic of the two, with a roof garden over the entry, and we had used a combination of natural materials and steel. Leia seemed to have an immediate connection, and when it was completed, it looked like the furniture was built for that house."

"People want luxury and uniqueness... Everything doesn't have to be a white farmhouse with black sashes. As builders, we can embrace good, real design. It's about authenticity."

– Paul Harris, Cole Harris Homes

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Beyond the Blueprint

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Bob Sprouls and Darren Andreoli are partners in Westport based Bluewater Homebuilders. The company has won many custom and spec home HOBI Awards over the past seven years.

“We won a 2018 Custom Home HOBI Award for a 3,300 sf waterfront custom in Westport. We like to help our clients through the approval process, and we

brought this home thru a Westport variance and zoning.

Our client is a well known artist, and she wanted us to get involved in the design, along with architect, Tanner White. Every room in the home has a dramatic view of Long Island Sound, and the we outfitted the interior with a modern cold rolled steel fireplace wall with white oak shelves and a floating steel staircase with open white oak treads. It made the cover of

Westport Magazine.”

– Bob Sprouls, Bluewater Home Builders



“We do both custom and spec. The spec homes we build target the high end market with pristine locations. . . It’s more of an economic and market exercise, where we’re assessing land and trends, and making decisions on bringing something of value to the customer. That translates well into custom housing. Everyone

wants to talk about value and the economics, so there’s a lot of crossover.

The important rooms today are kitchen, family room and study... Elevators have taken off over the past 4-5 years, and are now standard in luxury homes.

It’s part of wellness, having your life be easier...

Millennials want technology and convenience and for empty nesters it’s low maintenance and service.”

– Darren Andreoli, Bluewater Home Builders



Dibico Construction in Greenwich offers high end custom new construction, remodeling and lifestyle services.

Julio’s clients wanted a more proactive rather than reactive home management structure, so in 2013, he formed a separate division called Dibico Home Management with its own PM’s, site supers and technicians. He offers the service to both clients and non clients.

“It’s something to offset the risk in down times, and it keeps you ahead of warranty issues,” Julio explained.

“For our 34,000 sf Custom Home of the Year in Greenwich, one of the biggest challenges was our discovery of a leaking gas tank under a garage on the property. After cleaning the contaminated site, we went from an initial design that called for slab on grade, to an 18 ft excavation and expanded foundation with lower level mechanical room, sports complex and indoor pool. The completed home is on five levels – three levels above ground and two levels below.”

– Julio DiBiase, Dibico Construction



Architect, Chris Pagliaro, is a partner in PBS Architects. He has designed multiple HOBI winning homes that have won top HOBI Awards, including Custom Home of the Year, Remodeled Home of the Year and Project of the Year. Chris spoke about today’s luxury homebuyer.

“The spec market is targeted to the impatient. This generation grew up with the iPhone and instant gratification. They don’t have the patience for a custom home... They want something unique and then they want to know when they’re going to close... The spec market should really focus on creating unique homes... The projects we do are targeted to 25 percent of the potential buyers not the 75 percent. You get more money out of building for that 25 percent who want uniqueness, than building for everybody.”

– Chris Pagliaro, PBS Architects