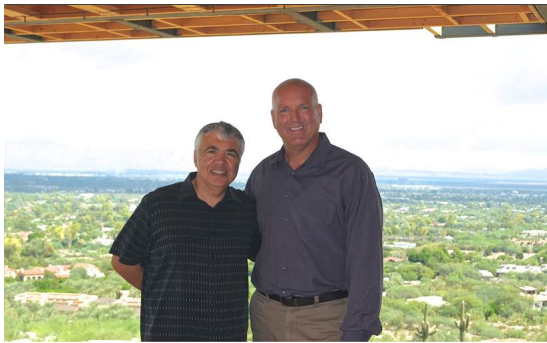


Architects Help Create "Amazing"

Written by Tom Monte and Dave Green



If you're building a new one or updating your home, a good architect is a solid foundation.



Nick Tsontakis and Tom Monte

The right architect and the relationship he/she builds with the contractor will determine the quality of your custom home or the modernizing of your existing one, your satisfaction through the design and construction process and, ultimately, your happiness.

Scottsdale's Nick Tsontakis, AIA, is one of the finest Valley architects we have worked with, someone who has established a well-regarded business for almost 20 years and who understands the importance of well-crafted relationships.

Principal of Scottsdale's Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors, he is also founder, director and publisher of Arizona Residential Architects (ARA), representing himself and other high-end Valley design professionals and building/design vendors associated with them.

Experienced architects such as Tsontakis bring a unique tool belt to the custom building process, offering extensive knowledge of existing and new-build structures, the market and the building requirements for the project municipality; finely honed design skills; optimizing space; familiarity with the newest and best building materials; renewable and sustainable design; and the ability to realize clients' visions and work within their budgets.

Consider remodeling, an option many are choosing for their homes. First, Tsontakis tells clients to evaluate the worth of surrounding homes in the neighborhood and the neighborhood itself.

Valuing *your* home highly doesn't mean your *home* is highly valued. Good architects will help you see clearly through the haze of important decisions that will need to be made. Will your remodeling or new-build investment be justified or will it not be recoverable, even in good times?

Quality architects work with us and our team to ensure that an existing home is structurally, mechanically and electrically sound. Will you be able to use parts of the existing structure, such as floor slabs, foundations, walls and roofs in the new design? Some old homes, for example, require extensive structural modifications, such as reinforcing the foundation.

Consider the solar exposure of the home for energy efficiency and if existing systems, such as the heating-cooling system and plumbing, will work with the new project. Is old electrical wiring a fire hazard? Termites? Or, are there hazardous materials such as lead paint or asbestos which need to be addressed?

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Look closely at the quality of plans. Architects should ensure that the plans aren't just what Tsontakis calls psychological blueprints: They carry details but not enough details for the builder or its trades to understand on a job-site.



We've heard many stories about contractors' complaints that they, or their subcontractors and trades can't build a project from plans they can't understand. That costs money. As with good tools, good plans need to be sharp. Greater specificity is always desired: Err on the side of details. Good architects do.

A major focus for those planning a new home or modernizing an existing one is space-planning, including the proportion and layout of rooms. Ceiling heights, for instance: Older homes tend to have smaller rooms than what we like now. They also tend to limit space more rigidly than we prefer with our open Arizona lifestyles. At their best, architects can open up, or plan, the home and the rooms while still maintaining their intimacy and warmth.

The construction industry changes constantly. Your architect should be tech savvy, aware of the many new design tools such as 3-D and virtual reality walk-throughs. And, while building green is still more expensive than not, the returns to you in utility bills savings, long-term value and the consciousness that you're furthering these commendable goals are extensive.

Working with us, the building team, quality architects are wayfinders, helping you see the "big picture" and unify your space inside and out. Your home should look timeless as though it could have been built yesterday, a decade or more ago or tomorrow. Maybe it's not the Taj Mahal or Taliesin West, but it's yours.

Offering four decades of experience in building and renovation, Arizona Structures serves the East Valley, Arcadia, Scottsdale and Paradise Valley and has recently won a 2014 Best of Gilbert Award for General Contractor. This is the fourth of an ongoing series on your home and was assisted by David M. Brown (azwriter.com). Questions? Send them to Tom Monte, tom@azstructures.com.

Photo credit: Scott Sandler