



The Courtyard House is among seven custom single-family homes designed by AVR Studio. Rendering courtesy of AVR Studio

Custom Home Designs Bring AVR Studio Back to Firm's Early Days

REAL ESTATE: Seven New Del Mar Homes Range \$6.5M-\$10.5M

■ By RAY HUARD

SAN DIEGO – AVR Studio, led by Douglas Austin and Chris Veum, is going back to its roots, designing a series of single-family homes, including a seven-home project in Del Mar.

The architectural firm has gained a reputation for building big residential and school projects, but Austin and Veum got their start designing single-family homes.

"It's kind of been fun," said Austin, who

formed the firm in 1976 when a friend asked him to design a new single-family home for himself and his wife.

"He was so happy with the house that, before I knew it, I had more than I could deal with," Austin said. "It just led to a lot of houses that I did, I can't remember how many, but it was a lot."

Over time, the firm moved on to bigger projects, getting away



Douglas Austin
Founder
AVR Studio

from designing single-family homes.

"We got so wrapped up in large-scale projects, we weren't doing custom homes so often," Austin said.

Veum said that designing custom homes is a good test of an architect's skills.

"It's a real test if you're listening to your client instead of listening to your ego," said Veum, partner

and president of AVR. "My first internship was working on single-family homes."

'Contemporary' Homes Built on Hillside

The seven homes that are among AVR's latest projects are on a hillside site.

"It's steep and that's an area where we want to make those houses work with the Hillside," Austin said.

The homes are built with fire resistant

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materials, like stone, concrete and metal.

"We're sensitive to the fact that they're on a canyon and there's potential for fire to come up the canyon," Veum said.

A "classic courtyard," two-story house of 9,347 square feet that Veum designed as part of the seven-home project is built around a courtyard with a pool in the middle and a koi pond at the courtyard entrance.

"One of the things the client is letting us do is design all these homes to be contemporary," Veum said. "We're kind of tired of doing the old Mediterranean thing."

The main level of the courtyard house has daily living and entertainment spaces,



Chris Veum
Partner/President
AVR Studio

connected to the courtyard, pool and outdoor kitchen through retractable glass walls.

The lower level is stone clad, and the upper level is finished in fire-resistant composite wood.

In addition to the main house with six bedrooms, six bathrooms and one half-bathroom, there's a 1,200-square-foot accessory dwelling unit, also known as a granny flat, with two bedrooms and two bathrooms.

The house has a U-shaped floor plan, with the U "sort of splayed open a little bit," Veum said.

Austin is also designing the renovation of a Del Mar home for himself and his wife.

"We're converting the dining room to a bedroom, pulling walls out of the living room so it's an indoor-outdoor living room, and adding nice big decks," Austin said.

Multi-Generational Design Adds Some Affordability

Austin and Veum concede that the homes that they design are beyond the means of most people who live in San Diego, with the seven homes in their latest venture priced from \$6.5 million to \$10.5 million.

By comparison, the median price of a single-family home in San Diego has been hovering at a little more than \$1 million.

"Most of these homes that we're designing, including my own, are designed to be multi-generational homes," Austin said. "It's one of the few ways younger people can have a chance to live in San Diego, and likewise older people. They can be for a parent, or they could be for someone trying to get a start."

A hallmark of AVR's design for large-scale projects and single-family homes is a sensitivity to the surrounding environment.

"One of my pet peeves is the way a lot of developers over the years in San Diego have

just cut and filled some of the beautiful topography that we have and scarred the land," Austin said.

Austin said that AVR will do more work designing custom single-family homes.

"Some of these are not going to be brand new homes. Some of them will be major remodels, because nobody wants to give up those good mortgages that they have," Austin said. ■

AVRP Studios



FOUNDED: 1976

FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN: Douglas Austin

HEADQUARTERS: East Village, San Diego

BUSINESS: Architects and Interior Designers

EMPLOYEES: 44

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NOTABLE: AVR Studio has designed more than \$3-billion worth of construction projects