



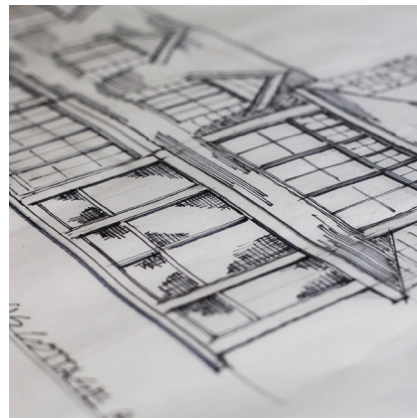
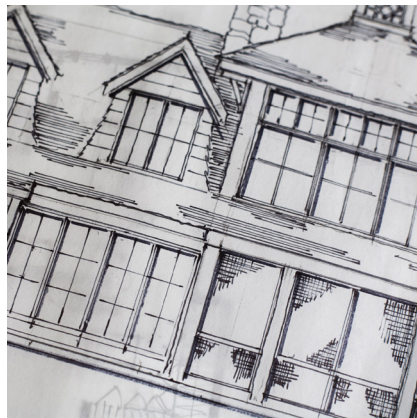
DRAWING DREAM HOMES

Architectural designer Gary Nance has always been a possibility thinker

WORDS BY CRYSTAL HAMMON + PHOTOGRAPH BY POLINA OSHEROV

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Prolific Indianapolis designer of resort homes and commercial buildings, Gary Nance doodled drawings of houses at an age when most kids strive to scrawl stick figures. “I couldn’t sit still to watch TV,” he says of his pre-K days. “I would have a little notepad in front of me, constantly sketching little houses and designing different things.” By the time he reached grade school, Nance was studying home plans sold in dime stores and pharmacies, making little tweaks to improve them.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, and raised in Indianapolis, Nance attended Arlington High School, where he excelled in hockey, made average grades in math, and struggled with dyslexia. A high school guidance counselor tried to steer him toward vocational training, but Nance ignored the advice and forged ahead. He studied architecture at Ball State University and later transferred to Chicago’s Harrington College of Design, graduating with a degree in commercial design.

From high school through college, Nance worked summers for his high school hockey coach, an Indianapolis home builder. Gradually, Nance spent more time drawing homes than digging fence holes, and the job helped pay for college.

The week after college graduation, Nance went to work in the design center of Helmut Jahn & Associates, a major, international architectural firm. From an office overlooking Michigan Avenue, he spent his days doing the concept drawings architects use to ignite interest and win projects.

Despite a lifetime of preparation and an unmistakable gift, Nance was incredulous that his dream had come true. “There I was, the dyslexic kid up in the design center,” he says. He was starting his career in one of the most interesting and coveted roles in architecture – a triumph of perseverance he would never quite forget.

dyslexia. The goal is to introduce them to adults who share the language-based learning disability. He wants parents to know that, with perseverance and the right support, their child can still succeed.

Nance remembers the feeling of “being different” from other kids. “I had tough years when I would think, ‘Gosh, what is wrong with me?’” Nance says. “But I just kept pushing. I thought, ‘This is the only thing I know and the only thing I love. I’m going to make this thing happen.’”

THE RULES OF REINVENTION

To keep himself fresh, Nance pores over design books and devours a Friday section of the Wall Street Journal about design and housing. At 63, the designer is at the top of his game, with so little free time that his relevancy has never been a legitimate question.

Houzz, the online platform for design, architecture, and remodeling, recently picked Gary Nance Design and a handful of other firms to help predict the future of design. Delta Faucet chose him to be part of a team that designed the next generation of luxury Brizo faucets and bath fixtures.

A history of designing and fabricating hard-to-find embellishments and hardware for his projects spawned his latest enterprise—the Gary Nance Collection, American-made hardware for designers and builders. “There are so many things you can do in this business,” he says. “That’s why it’s so fun.” Nance relies on his 26-year-old daughter, Taylor, to help keep him organized. “Honestly, I couldn’t do this without her,” he says.

People who appreciate attention to detail are often drawn to Nance’s zeal for making a home as functional as it is beautiful. “I’m also a big advocate of line of sight – what you see when you walk into a home, and unique features that make a house special,” he says. One of his trademarks is the creation of interior design booklets, which unify each project’s design concepts by showing precise details, from the location of the electrical outlets and thermostat, to how the kitchen looks.

For high-end clients who can afford to offload the bother of building a luxury home, Nance offers turnkey services. He just completed one such project, a home on Walloon Lake in northern Michigan for a homeowner who lives in Jacksonville, Florida. The interior design firm was in Chicago, and the builder was in Michigan. Nance’s coordination of all the players required him to be in Michigan four days a month during construction. “When the owners moved in, they didn’t even have to carry in a toothbrush,” he says. “We had the beds made, toothbrushes in their containers, favorite liquors and snacks – everything ready to go when they walked in.”

The cottage lake house look may be an emblem of past work, but Nance loves the diversity of today’s hybrid design trends and enjoys pushing himself to evolve. One recently finished resort home, for example, combines 100-year-old barn siding on the exterior, with black steel windows, a metal roof and wood floors. “It is kind of updated Restoration-Hardware-marries-Pottery-Barn look—very sophisticated and clean.”

East coast aesthetics merge with low-country style in a contemporary Nance home at The Ford Plantation, a residential community near Savannah, Georgia. At Jackson’s Grant, a development at 116th and Springmill Road in Indianapolis, Nance is preparing to start 42 townhouses. “They aren’t the typical townhouse you see around here, but more like Lincoln Park or Beekman Place townhouses with that old-time look,” he says.

Nance is excited to see so many new residential developments in Indianapolis, a market he considers ripe for innovation. In a city pulsing with energetic people who are working in the technology sector, it’s time for designers and builders to stop mimicking each other and start looking up and out for inspiration, according to Nance.

“Now that these young men and women are making money and buying houses, they are expecting their home designers to bring the same energy that they give,” he says. “They don’t want something that builders have been doing for the past twenty years.” If past is prologue, count on Nance to keep leading the way forward, pushing the outer limits on out-of-the-box design and unconventional thinking in the Circle City. <

RIFFING ON OPTIMISM

A decade after joining Helmut Jahn & Associates, Nance returned to Indianapolis and started Gary Nance Design. Known for its unique lakefront properties, his firm remains in Indiana, even though he conducts 40 percent of his business outside the state.

If you’re in a position to hire Nance, you might see him draw your dream home in real time. He sketches every home by hand. Each design is then converted and checked in CAD later. “I’m a design-concept guy,” he says. “I’ve got to keep moving.” He credits much of his success to a genuine passion that his clients easily sense.

Even during lean years for builders and home designers, Nance stays busy doing resort homes. “That money never dries up,” he says. Neither does Nance’s exuberance for life, it seems.

A few years ago, a series of events made him aware that his fast-paced, unhealthy lifestyle could separate him from everything he loved – his family and his work. He started working with a personal trainer at a gym in Fishers, changed his diet, and lost 90 pounds. “I still can’t believe I pulled it off,” he says. “I’m in better shape than I was in high school. People ask me how I’ve balanced my workouts with work, but, believe it or not, I’ve been more efficient in my work because I have to schedule myself.”

His trainer was so proud that he urged Nance to enter a few bodybuilding contests. Last spring Nance won second place in a competition for his age group. His path to better health inspired many of his Baby Boomer friends and colleagues to improve their own health.

Nance grooves on a sunny vibe that all things are possible through hard work. It’s a creed he loves to share with people who feel obstructed. For the past three summers, he has spoken at a summer camp designed to encourage kids who are learning to cope with

