

# **Building**<sup>TM</sup> **EDGE** MAGAZINE

*The Local Voice in Building*



## BENCHMARK HOMES

'PROFESSIONALS SERVING  
PROFESSIONALS'

Nancy and Rich Morrison, Irina Johnson







# BENCHMARK HOMES

'PROFESSIONALS SERVING PROFESSIONALS'

by Ledyard Woods

This tasteful great room features a coffered ceiling, custom built-in pine entertainment center and cabinets flanking the fireplace and Scagliola stone mantel. Floor is hardwood. Photo by Paul Johnson, Benchmark Homes.

There surely is no management team in Northeast Florida any more committed to crafting distinct custom luxury homes with any more precision and sophistication than the professionals at Benchmark Homes.

When it comes to streamlining the processes of designing and building multi-million-dollar residential creations, the management prowess exhibited by this highly reputable Jacksonville Beach homebuilding company is regarded as far beyond ordinary. And it has the pedigree to prove it.

Benchmark Homes is known for the uniqueness and quality of the homes it has been building for over a decade in some of the more prestigious and exclusive communities throughout the Jacksonville area. Founders Bill and Barbara Jackson established the company's high performance bar at the very outset in the early 1990s. Standards continued at the highest level when Rich Morrison and the Jacksons a few years later became business partners. And as its name implies, Benchmark Homes continues

today – five years after the founding couple retired and Rich and Nancy Morrison became sole owners – to represent the building industry as a standard-bearer when it comes to managing home construction.

In fact, the management practices in place at Benchmark Homes were cited for top honors by Custom Home magazine when the company was selected as a Pacesetter Award winner for 2005. The recognition designated Benchmark Homes as one of the custom building industry's top achievers for the year.

The Pacesetter Award also serves to reward the Morrisons for a determined five-year effort in transitioning the company into a highly computerized operation when it comes to the planning, scheduling and myriad of processes and procedures involved in the design and construction of custom luxury homes.

“This was the biggest challenge for us as a custom builder,” admits Nancy Morrison, who along with her husband, Rich, provide extensive experience in residential construction and business management as the owners of Benchmark Homes.

“I come from a processes and procedures background where everything should be very orderly and organized,” Nancy explains in pointing out the variables of building a home, especially when each creation is uniquely different from the previous one. “The difficult part is that you never have the opportunity to work through a plan that is drawn on paper, and there are always issues that come up in transferring from paper to sticks and bricks.”

When Irina Johnson joined Benchmark Homes as vice president of operations she brought experience with an international semi-custom builder, in conjunction with a systems and logistics background. Irina agreed there was no reason that a process and procedure couldn't be developed for each aspect of the business. What evolved was an innovative management philosophy that maximizes the effective use of resources and personnel in creating a system that is not only efficient and profitable, but one that keeps Benchmark customers satisfied.

Although their backgrounds differ dramatically, the Morrisons provide Benchmark Homes with a solid husband-wife ownership team that furnishes hands-on leadership when it comes to routine daily operations.

A West Virginia native who was raised in Alabama and Florida, Rich Morrison earned a chemical engineering degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and then a master's degree in business. He served as a Navy pilot for six years.

Morrison joined Benchmark Homes as a partner in 1994, where his chief areas of responsibility were and continue to be architectural design, finance, legal and field operations.

Rich becomes involved extensively with clients in the design process, from the initial meetings with an architect. Morrison says that if the home isn't designed properly in the initial phase, it won't meet the clients'

expectations in the end. The builder/architect/client relationship is the basis for a successful project. He is also passionate about ensuring each home is placed on a lot to take optimum advantage of the natural views of the home site.

Nancy Morrison joined Benchmark Homes six years ago. Her primary responsibilities are multi-faceted: strategic planning, development of operational processes & procedures, personnel management, customer relations, marketing, and warranty. In addition, she has a flair for unique and attractive interior design of homes and works extensively with clients during selections of colors and interior options. She combines an unwavering attention to detail and quality with a keen eye for color and finishes in adding a special touch to Benchmark Homes' speculative projects.

As owners of Benchmark Homes, the Morrisons and their staff of professionals typically work with an affluent clientele. Some are local buyers moving up in price range, others are building homes in the area now in anticipation of retirement and others are relocating to the Jacksonville area with corporate moves.

“Our typical customer is someone who obviously appreciates quality and demands professionalism from a builder,” Nancy Morrison says. “They want a highly organized company with great references, and they recognize what Benchmark Homes has to offer. They want a builder who runs an

operation in the same manner as they would run their own business. That's where we're always going to shine.”

In the construction of ten to 14 luxury custom homes each year, Benchmark Homes' projects are found in select locations that extend from Palencia, just north of St. Augustine, to preferred communities throughout the greater Jacksonville area. Some of the company's currently available speculative home designs include:

#### **In Palencia:**

The Villa Bellezza – a luxurious courtyard pool home featuring Old World craftsmanship. Priced at \$2.4 million.

The Castellano – a genuine work of art priced at \$1.85 million.

The Mirabella – capturing all that is best in the Florida lifestyle. Priced at \$1.2 million.

#### **Pablo Creek Reserve:**

The Villa San Remo – featuring Spanish-texture stucco with ArcusStone detailing. Priced at \$1.85 million.

The Villa del Lago – featuring a Mediterranean courtyard pool design. Priced at \$1.6 million.

Each individual element of a Benchmark home is a showcase of creativity, craftsmanship and attention to detail and quality. Photo by Paul Johnson, Benchmark Homes.





A dramatic staircase with wood treads and imported Italian limestone risers creates an impressive entryway. Photo by Paul Johnson, Benchmark Homes.

A center island with onyx countertop, custom cabinetry and stainless steel appliances are included in this gourmet kitchen. The hardwood floors and beamed ceiling add warmth to this hub of family activity. Photo by Paul Johnson, Benchmark Homes.

#### Queen's Harbour:

A luxurious Bella Riva villa featuring Old World styling without sacrificing any modern convenience. Priced at \$1.65 million.

The Bella Vista – featuring a unique design and a wide variety of upgrades and finishes, all overlooking a panoramic marsh-front view. Priced at \$1.65 million.

#### Marsh Landing

Found Forest, the newest estate development in Marsh Landing, will pro-

vide a 2 1/2 acre home site for Benchmark's new model home, featuring over 6,000 square feet of living space (over 9,300 square feet covered). This Santa Barbara-style home will serve as the Morrisons' residence and sales model, and is scheduled for completion in early 2007.

In addition, Benchmark Homes is active in the preferred communities of Deerwood, Plantation Golf & Country Club, and Sawgrass. The company also specializes in master-crafted estates on oceanfront, intra-coastal and riverfront lots.

Rich and Nancy Morrison recognize that the building of a custom luxury home represents a particular challenge that is dependent on interaction with a creative team consisting of builders, architects, designers and suppliers. Benchmark Homes' owners are confident their own team is unsurpassed when it comes to building custom luxury homes in the Jacksonville market. "When all is said and done, we want people to be able to say: 'You can really tell the difference in a Benchmark home.'"

"As a custom builder, each of our homes – and each of our customers – is unique," says Rich Morrison. "In the end, we're driven by the needs of those customers, and it's our job to make sure each home we build is exactly what our customer wants."

In fulfilling this mandate, each home built by Benchmark Homes becomes unique and distinct in itself. And each creation adds to the success of a company that was founded on quality and has sustained a reputation for product excellence.

The Benchmark owners agree that "our goal for the future is to absolutely further develop our name recognition as the highest quality builder of unique custom luxury homes. We want our organization always to be respected for integrity, quality and efficient management practices, and for our management staff and employees to always remember that our customers come first."

For Rich and Nancy Morrison and Benchmark Homes, that means simply staying the course. **E**

*For more information on Benchmark Homes, call (904) 280-8777, or visit their corporate website at [www.customluxuryhomes.com](http://www.customluxuryhomes.com). Benchmark Homes is located at 1579 The Greens Way, #12, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32246.*

