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ARCHITECT SETH BALLARD, AS TOLD TO FINN MOSTOW

Craft is the difference between a regular space and a unique space. My most important role as an architect is to help my clients articulate what they want their space to achieve, and to help them envision what might be. The goal is a unique space that will sustain my client's happiness and pride for decades because it is an expression of his or her self. My primary tool in achieving this goal is craft. I use craftsmen and women who put their soul into a project, and when the homeowners and architects do the same...that's luxury.

My aim is to expose Ballard+Mensua clients to what's really possible and to discover what they really like. We talk about their personal experiences and preferences, such as what they've seen and liked in their travels. They've often tasted the type of luxury—the *craftsmanship*—that I advocate. I then translate their thoughts into a design that expresses their unique vision.

At the Carr Residence, we faced an unusual challenge: blending the homeowners' appreciation of traditional New England architecture with their love of modern design and details. This project epitomizes the answer to this question.

New England architecture has Shaker roots, as evidenced by its simple lines and columns. At the Carr Residence, the exterior showcases this simplistic New England style, but the interior's dramatic windows offer the contemporary design that the homeowners were looking to add. While keeping with an open, modern floor plan, we introduced craft and layers of simple details to reflect the property's historic maritime roots. Featured details include built-in furniture pieces that were crafted by Cabico, a Quebec-based custom-cabinetry company; hand-hewn timber frames by South County Post & Beam in Providence, Rhode Island; and handmade glass tiles by Anna Cabo in California. Everything was installed by local craftsmen, as well.

I am constantly scouting for craftsmen. Sometimes while I'm traveling, I'm lucky enough to find someone who creates really high-quality,



ABOUT SETH BALLARD

The principal and founder of Ballard+Mensua Architecture, Seth Ballard, NCARB, AIA, knew when he was seven years old that he wanted to be an architect. After graduating from Tulane University with a master's degree in architecture, Ballard worked as a freelance designer for four years before joining Soe Lin & Associates as a project manager in 1996. Ballard stayed at the firm for nine years, working on an average of 40-50 residential projects per year. In 2005, Ballard teamed up with Vicente Mensua to start Ballard+Mensua Architecture with the goal of creating unique, custom residential designs and providing the requisite construction-management services.

unique pieces, but other times I find craftsmen through Internet searches and frequenting trade shows, craft shows, and gallery openings. While at restaurants and dinner parties, if I see a detail I like, I seek out who did the work, and then I research and learn more about the author's capabilities. I also constantly peruse magazines—I probably read 20 or more design publications monthly.

Many people don't realize how much craft they are exposed to on a regular basis. I bring my clients to places with examples of good craft so we can discuss how it makes the space unique. I then take them to Ballard+Mensua projects, where they'll see true carpenter craft in the form of custom cabinets, unique porches and railings, exterior stonework and masonry, and bath-

rooms with unique marble and stone—all done by skilled craftsmen. They see firsthand what a qualitative difference craft makes.

Good craftsmanship is an affordable luxury. It's regrettable, in my opinion, that people often perceive a so-called custom home with builder-grade windows and crown-molding packages as "luxury." They don't realize how much more personal expression they can achieve in the same budget range.

I believe we need to dream, and work back from the dream to the reality of what we can afford. However, beauty and happiness is somewhere in between, and I push for the extreme. ●



CARR RESIDENCE

Ballard+Mensua took full advantage of gorgeous coastal views, providing for changing perspectives of the New England landscape. The home's plan is divided into distinct areas appropriately named for their shapes and the experiences one can enjoy in each space. The Sunrise Tower and the Sunset Porch are just two architectural moments that make the Carr Residence a beautiful piece of finely crafted New England architecture.

Photos: Michael Scullinger