

# Stairway To Elegance



*Designed to replicate real limestone, the home's scored stucco front accents the steeply pitched roof creating an old-world grandeur reminiscent of the French countryside.*

## *Stately Manor Tames Landscape With Multilevel Design*

*The trademark front stairway features a curving balcony designed by residential designer Jim Phelps and built by Jim Benham to mirror the piano alcove in the grand salon.*





*The deep reds, coppers and creams in the grand salon jump to life as morning sun streams through the piano bay and complements the gentle lighting of the coffered ceiling.*



*The home's intimate yet formal spaces provided interior designer Trudy G. Green with an abundance of lighting and placement options for the homeowner's unique furniture and art collection.*

When builder Jim Benham decided to turn one of the most challenging lots in south Charlotte into a sophisticated French Country estate, he chose a residential designer whose easygoing personality may hide the fact that he's created some of the hottest home designs on the market.

"People want something unpredictable," says Jim Phelps, the president and creative mind behind Carolina Design Group. "When you walk into this home, it has all these interesting levels... creating a mezzanine-type feel."

"Like you're in a very fine hotel," says the homeowner, leading up the first flight of stairs, past the study and into the owner's suite where the master bath presents a private retreat. The 12' high marble-tiled shower,

peaked skylight and gracious Jacuzzi create a spa-like aura. A few steps higher, the ceiling and floor drop away as a suspended landing sweeps out across the two-story foyer and the stairs continue to wind up to a crow's nest bedroom suite.

Jim Benham was inspired by the multilevel approach while touring one of Carolina Design Group's floor plans in HighGate at HomeArama 2003. "I loved how Jim Phelps used mid-levels in his design," says the seasoned builder, who has over 30 years of experience in the industry. "A good floor plan is not trendy. It's well planned. It takes into consideration how the space will be used, the orientation of the house, the proximity of



*The homeowner drew inspiration from several HomeArama showcases for the unique cast stone fireplace surrounds in the den and grand salon and for the kitchen's expansive granite-topped island.*

the rooms and the traffic flow." Jim Phelps' layout avoids the predictable placement of rooms and creates an exclusive space for each member of the family.

"At first I thought the stairs would be a hindrance," says the homeowner. "But having the division of a few steps here and there gives a lot more definition to a home this large."

At 8,400 square feet, the estate features six levels united by a stunning front cantilevered staircase and a more private rear staircase. From the 3,400-square-foot daylight basement to the

relaxing patio overlooking the adjoining golf course, the builder and designer used the unique contours of the terrain to define the home.

With a 16' ravine running through the middle of the original site, this was no easy feat.

"Since the topography of the lot would not easily accommodate a traditionally designed two story crawl space or basement home," says Jim Benham, who chose the homesite for his personal residence. "We decided a multi-level home would be the ideal solution and contacted Jim Phelps to produce the design."



*Brian Ries, of T.S. Woodworks, designed fine cabinetry throughout the home including custom kitchen cabinets with an antiqued French Country feel and braidwork reflected in the den's entertainment piece.*

*The master bath's central focus is a large marble-topped Jacuzzi flanked by Gothic columns and a decorative band of inlaid tile and naturally lit by a peaked skylight above.*



After reshaping the lot with over 350 truckloads of dirt, Jim Benham was approached by interested homebuyers. They had their hearts set on the neighborhood and liked what they saw in the plans, so he decided to sell. "In these established communities, the only lots left are the challenging ones, so you need a designer with a good imagination," he says.

Drawing on French Eclectic style, Jim Phelps designed a home with a strong exterior and graceful interior that reflect his company's careful attention to detail. "We take the time to get all the information up front," he says. "We want to make sure that at the end of the process the client walks into their home and it all works - exactly as they anticipated it would."

In their initial meeting with Carolina Design Group, each client fills out a dream sheet. This helps to focus in on the essential features of their custom home and set the tone for the overall design. Jim Phelps and his team of residential designers, interior designers, project managers and draftsmen then work together to ensure the seamless fusion of design, architecture, color and lifestyle.

Stepping across the weathered flagstone steps and through the handcrafted front door, it's easy to see why these homeowners stayed true to the original design. Complemented by their own tasteful decor, Jim Benham's fearless planning and Jim Phelps' creativity, the multilevel manor pleases all who enter.

*Carolina Design Group is currently located in Cornelius and has plans to open a new design studio in south Charlotte later this year.*

*For more information, call 704-895-7805 or visit [www.carolindesigngroup.com](http://www.carolindesigngroup.com).*

*To contact Benham Builders, call 704-847-3900.*

**Residential Design:**  
Carolina Design Group

**Builder:**  
Benham Builders

**Cabinets:**  
T.S. Woodworks

**Interior Design:**  
Trudy G. Green Interiors

**Landscape Design:**  
Lambeth Marshall



*Perfect for entertaining, the 3,400-square-foot walk-out basement features plenty of sunlight and a guest suite, game room, wine cellar, wet bar, home theater and exercise room.*

## *New Design Studio Opening at The Fountains*

Located on the corner of Ardrey Kell and Tom Short, Carolina Design Group's new South Charlotte office will be "fun and fresh," says Lead Designer Trisha Guay, who projects the grand opening for later this fall. "It's going to be a showroom/library/working space where clients can come to touch and feel actual samples."

The CDG Interior's menu of services will include: space planning, architectural detailing, finish selections and procurement. "A lot of our clients have special pieces of art, antiques and heirlooms," says Guay. "With architectural detailing, we can take that special piece and create a niche - making it a centerpiece in the room. We inventory existing furniture and incorporate it with the new design. Thinking through the furniture placement helps with the coordination of windows, doors and lighting."

Providing color renderings helps the CDG Interior team convey concepts as they work side by side with the residential designers to ensure that the interior architectural details and the overall style of the home are a perfect fit with the fixtures, colors and finishes.

"We have both contemporary and traditional clients," says Guay. "We also have a lot of clients who have never done this before. I can help narrow the choices down for them."

Even that rare grade of Italian marble?

She smiles, "My passport is up-to-date!"