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Nichols & Comito LLC

An 11-Year Partnership of Excellence

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An 11-Year Partnership of Excellence

By David Becker

Larry Nichols and Claude Comito are like great symphony conductors gathering together the finest craftspeople to create beautiful homes. Their 11-year partnership as Nichols & Comito has produced some of the most unique residences in Colorado Springs.

Part of what sets the firm apart is they really use their website in outreach marketing and they are not afraid to ask their customers how they are doing.

Nichols says, "In our 11-year partnership, we liked having control over the development process. Our niche in the market is creating beautiful homes on beautiful sites. We always have significant demand for quality. We often sell lots to people who do not build right away, but carefully plan the right house for the

site. We understand careful attention to detail."

Location is everything for every builder. Nichols & Comito maintain an inventory of the stunning view lots in Colorado Springs that simply cannot be duplicated. After 11 years, they finished their final home in Stratton Preserve, the gated community of the Village and Estate homes on 79 acres near the Broadmoor Resort Hotel.

In a joint venture with the developer, Nichols & Comito built seven homes in Stratton Pines, an exclusive 19-lot gated community situated high above Colorado Springs. They recently completed a five-bedroom, five-bath homestead at 2466 Stratton Pines that overlooks both the mountains and the lights of the city.

There are two master suites on the main level plus a curved

Great room at Star Ranch model



PHOTO BY TED MEHL, A BETTER IMAGE



Dining room at Star Ranch model

staircase to a cool upper-level loft. Owners love homes with these creative ideas. This home contains almost 5,800 square feet (4,700 square feet finished by the builder) plus a spacious three-car garage. The gourmet kitchen contains every convenience, top-of-the-line appliances plus alder cabinetry. The great room has a floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace and expansive windows to frame the city views.

Now, Nichols & Comito is beginning to build in two other locations. They saw customers who wanted quality homes but did not desire the large amount of square footage. Many of these buyers were empty nesters who wanted carefree living. Some buyers traveled frequently. All had busy families or preferred the amenities and lifestyles in the quality building communities.

For several years, Nichols & Comito negotiated to purchase and develop 54 acres adjacent to the Broadmoor Hotel owned by Young Life. Star Ranch was a working cattle ranch from the 1870s. The founder of Young Life, Jim Rayburn, got interested in the property in 1946 and knew it had potential.

When Rayburn first saw the Star Ranch property, he contacted his board in Dallas and suggested that they purchase it as a youth retreat in Colorado. Only Herb Taylor, the president of the national Young Life board in Dallas,

agreed with the purchase. Taylor believed in Rayburn's vision and bought it personally and leased it to Young Life for \$1 per year.

When it became available, Nichols & Comito immediately saw the potential of the 54 acres and sought to carefully plan it. Nichols said, "The character that defines this serene forest retreat when Young Lifers were here will be retained at Star Ranch. Natural courtyards and open commons, the massive boulders, stone walls, pines, mountain oak and other flora native to the area are integrated into the community plan along with an extensive trail system."

The stewardship of good design went into the site. Nichols & Comito planned two distinct gated communities. The

Village at Star Ranch consists of 40 single-family carefully planned lots with low-maintenance materials, natural stone, composite woods and metal roofing accents to blend with the natural surroundings. The community takes care of trash and snow removal, monitoring of home alarms and maintaining the landscape. The lots in the Village at Star Ranch are 1/4- to 2/3-acre in size.

Nichols said, "The Village at Star Ranch includes five home plans with 3,000 to 6,000 square feet on nice size lots with nature at the door step. We spent a lot of time with land planners pro-

Gourmet kitchen at Star Ranch model



PHOTOS BY TED MEHL, A BETTER IMAGE



Master suite at Star Ranch model

protecting the view corridors. We also wanted to retain the natural trees and old stone walls.” Nichols points out that this is the last site to develop in the 80906 ZIP code in Colorado Springs.

Nichols & Comito plan for the other segment is called The Estates at Star Ranch. It consists of 32 lots, 3/4 acre or larger. Homes built on these oversized lots are in the Cheyenne Mountain School District. The first model home is designed for gracious living with hardwood flooring, natural stone fireplaces, timber-wrapped passageways and the gourmet kitchens for which Nichols & Comito homes are known.

Nichols & Comito is also developing and plans to build on two parcels of land in Cedar Heights, a mature and popular development west of the Garden of the Gods bordering on the Pike National Forest. This gated community in the Manitou School District is on 990 acres (300 acres of open space) containing homes built with strict covenants. The hiking and nature trails are owned and maintained by the Cedar Heights community association.

Placer Park Ridge and Outback are the last parcels of land to be developed at Cedar Heights. There are 28 1- to 5-acre lots in Placer Park Ridge subdivision. These lots are priced from the mid-\$200s to the mid-\$500s. Nichols & Comito also developed 22 1-acre-plus lots in the

Outback at Cedar Heights priced from \$298,000. Outback at Cedar Heights will be available for construction beginning in 2008, but lots are for sale now. All Cedar Heights lots are on city of Colorado Springs utilities.

The office walls and show homes at Nichols & Comito overflow with design awards from the building industry. Notwithstanding the professional achievements, it pleases Nichols when their team sits down with a new customer and starts to bring a dream home to fruition. “I personally enjoy working with clients and getting a good sense of what they really want. Giving people a product that exceeds their expectations and is a great value pleases me to no end.”

It makes Nichols feel good to share in the

homeowners’ dreams.

Half of the Nichols & Comito clients are local and the other half come from outside the Colorado Springs area. Communication with a builder becomes especially important when there is distance between the builder and the customer. One international banker whose comments are posted on the Nichols & Comito website says that his family “would be very satisfied customers if we lived in Colorado Springs, but living thousands of miles away in Sydney, Australia, makes us ever more impressed with the outcome ... We could not have expected more attention to detail or respon-

Downstairs family room at Star Ranch model



siveness to our needs and preferences if we had lived in the next block rather than a 20-hour flight away.”

In an effort to make sure that they met their own expectations, this year Nichols & Comito asked an independent organization, GuildQuality of Atlanta, to survey their customers. Nine out of 10 of those folks answering the survey said that they would recommend Nichols & Comito to a friend to build their home. GuildQuality awarded the firm the 2007 Guildmaster with Distinction award for customer satisfaction and performance among custom builders. Comito said, “The ability to earn our

customers’ praise is the single-most reliable predictor of our company’s long-term success. Our clients are our best marketing tool and this GuildQuality award gives us a truly independent look at how we are doing.”

Tara Heringer, who works in sales and marketing at Nichols & Comito, said, “The architect works with Larry and Claude to find the materials to match the lot and the house design that the client likes. We want to give the client something that exceeds their expectation as a custom experience.” As a custom builder, it is possible to spend as much time as possible getting the clients’ input so that

they are involved in the building process. The builder lives with the process for a very short period of time, but the homeowner lives in the house for a lifetime.

The sales and marketing department makes good use of the www.nicholscomito.com website. The staff says that the biggest challenge is spelling “Nichols” correctly. On an average, the website has 55,000 to 60,000 monthly hits because of the awareness Nichols & Comito generate from their community advertising and their Web master keeps them high on the search engine lists. Nichols & Comito had a peak of 90,000 Web hits in one month in 2006.

Nichols points out that people recognize Nichols & Comito homes from their curb appeal. “Certainly when they see the inside, they are aware of the attention to detail in the craftsmanship of the wood-working, drywall and finishing. Realtors often note in their resale listings that we are the builders because it enhances the value for a buyer to know they are purchasing quality.”

Also known for their community service, Nichols and Comito sponsored the Celebration Home, bringing together others to raise \$300,000 for charity over the last nine years through their grand opening parties and entrance fees. In the early years they raised money for the American Cancer Society and the past few years’ generous donations have gone to Pikes Peak United Way. Nichols said, “I am most proud of our trade partners. They are the best in the industry. Many of

Inside the 2005 Celebration Home



PHOTO BY PAUL KOHLMAN, PHOTO COURTESY OF NICHOLS & COMITO LLC

our subcontractors have been with us for years and are very loyal. It creates total finish work on our homes.” They also contributed to the Celebration Homes.

Each year the Celebration Home is a special creation unique to Colorado Springs, open to public display. In 2005, Nichols & Comito built an 11,000-square-foot Tuscan mansion, decorated by Joni Bader, in north Colorado Springs.

In 2006, they built the Celebration Home at Stratton Forest. This 8,000-square-foot villa (again, decorated by the Joni Bader interior design team) includes an outdoor spa, bar and edgeless pool. Inside, a hand-carved marble fireplace accents the formal dining space and the walls in the study are leather. There is a six-car garage. This home took 14 months to build for Kathy and Sam Guadagnoli. When Nichols & Comito finished, it was a showplace that piqued the curiosity of the Colorado Springs community, raising money generously for the United Way. After the grand opening, thousands of people toured the home.

Both Nichols and Comito served terms as president of the Home Builders Association of Colorado Springs and have interest in affordable housing in Colorado Springs. They work within their local association to help create standards to keep housing costs reasonable here. Nichols said, “We have seen incredible growth in Colorado Springs since 1991. The high end of the

market where we build might be a bit more insulated compared to starter and intermediate range homes. All the extra costs of building get passed on to the consumer, which has an impact on the affordability of housing.”

Nichols is a national life director in the building association and responsible to keep in contact with members of Congress on pending legislation that affects the home building industry.

A partnership that lasts 11 years is remarkable. Nichols and Comito commit themselves to working together for the common good of the customer. They have a staff who pampers the clients through the building process and trade partners on whom they depend once the construction begins. Nichols said, “The home becomes more than the living space. We might be creating dual office space for a husband and wife plus exercise space. Today, more people require space that is unique, which makes our job of creating a home both exciting and challenging.”

Creating memorable homes for people is an exciting venture for Larry Nichols and Claude Comito. They have pride in the work and a reputation for quality workmanship in the Colorado Springs community. They do not lose their enthusiasm for the next design and bring their creativity to each new house they build.

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Exterior of home in Stratton Forest



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