

Colorado Springs

STYLE



Inside:
Nichols & Comito
A Study in Excellence



With the right touch and the right builder, the most expansive room becomes an intimate living area.



by William P. Marino



Larry Nichols (left) and Claude Comito

NICHOLS & COMITO

A STUDY IN EXCELLENCE

Enter the world of Nichols and Comito, and prepare to be amazed – surely by the truly stunning custom homes they build in the Colorado Springs area, but perhaps more surprisingly by the collegial and dedicated culture that exists throughout their organization. Larry Nichols and Claude Comito, for whom the firm is named, have found their purpose in life, building a tight-knit team that creates elegant homes that emanate a grand lifestyle – a lifestyle so distinctive that no detail is too minute to escape their watchful eye in a collective quest for excellence.

Whether provincial European, mountain lodge traditional American or contemporary style, every Nichols and Comito home is unique – as unique as each of their clients. For this tandem, customer service is their mantra for doing business. They know what's important – the customer. And everything revolves around that central business principle.

“We’re focused on creating a product that is unique, and it starts with listening to the client,” Larry says. “Then we look at every creative way to exceed their expectations. It’s personal

service, attention to detail and a team commitment that brings it all together.”

“We’re in the service business. Anyone in our industry that forgets that won’t be in business very long. The building process is not always perfect,” Claude reveals, “but we build in procedures to ensure that we have the opportunity to make things right. For example, we include three walk-throughs for our clients: one before they take possession, another in 30 days, and we contact them about 11 months later to schedule another visit just to make certain they are happy customers.”

To truly appreciate a Nichols and Comito home, you must walk through one. We did just that at Stratton Preserve. We toured the “Wellington” – a stunning 6,117 square-foot estate home. Embellished with wide-plank hardwood floors, vaulted and beamed ceilings and an idyllic wall mural, it was a jaw-dropping experience to see how a home of this stately size can create intimate spaces. It was work of art – grandeur personified.

The company not only builds homes in the Springs’ prestigious neighborhoods, such as Stratton Preserve, Stratton



PHOTO BY ROGER WADE

By listening to their clients, Nichols & Comito create homes as unique as their homeowners, room by room.

Pines, Kissing Camels and Broadmoor Resort Community, they maintain an inventory of some of the finest home sites in the area - home sites that by virtue of their natural environs and views would be difficult to match anywhere in the region.

Nichols and Comito are homebuilders - that is the manifestation of their passion. They are smart - business smart and people smart. They are communicators. They have vision - and limitless passion for it. Spend a few minutes in the same room with either, and you'd find their energy contagious. They are builders, yes, but they both embody the qualities of a leader - and that's what drives their business. Pick up any graduate-level business school text on leadership and you'll find that they have the bases covered.

"We're committed to building a team," explains Larry. Our job is to provide focus, empower our people and help them reach toward a higher level, always with the customer in mind."

"A lot of it happens by osmosis," Claude adds. The team sees how we operate. We will always go the extra distance. If a client doesn't think they've gotten the value they expected - we will provide it."

With all the hype in the marketplace about leadership, quality

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control and team building - these guys could write the book. They live it everyday. Leadership and excellence is about communications, vision, integrity and demonstrating the behaviors that lead to success. While clearly driven, these are not

two men hell-bent to succeed at all costs - they do it right, by putting people first: their customers and their employees in a symbiotic balance that allows the right outcome to occur. Jim Collins, the Boulder-based management guru and best-selling author of *Good to Great*, might consider a chapter on Nichols and Comito in a future edition.

"We are successful because of our team," Claude states. "Once we put the processes in place, Larry and I had to learn to let go, trust our people and provide coaching and guidance along the way. In my mind, a successful business leader sets the standards and the priorities, and then finds the people who are compatible with those objectives."

"As individuals, Claude and I are both control freaks," admits Larry. "We both had been successful through our own strengths and our own sweat. But to make our partnership work and the business function, we knew we had to give something up to allow others to grow. It was up to us to prepare the business plan, communicate our mission and set the goals; then help everyone work to them."

Both agree that their partnership works because they share a common philosophy. "We have respect and confidence in each other; we both have high standards and both believe in the same ethical principles of business," says Larry. "And we know it takes a team

effort to win."

Whether through training, experience or intuition, this Rogers and Hammerstein of homebuilding have orchestrated a symphony of success - a score that time and time again harmoniously hits the highest note to please its audience of distinguishing homebuyers.

With such a commitment to excellence, customers are effusive in their praise: "Larry and Claude were incredibly responsive," explains Dr. Kenneth Kurica, an orthopedic surgeon in Colorado Springs. "They listened to our ideas, made creative suggestions, and then let us make choices we could live with for years to come."

"We were surprised, in fact, that upon completion, our home met and went beyond our expectations," says Christopher Dean and Jill Trenary Dean, both Olympic Ice Skaters. "We've actually become friends through the experience, and enjoy Larry and Claude as people. Nichols and Comito deserves high praise for professionalism and for the close attention both builders pay to their customers' goals and preferences."

And, of course, such accolades do not happen by accident. Spend any time at all with the two gentlemen builders, and you'd be certain that they'd be successful no matter their pursuit. But be assured, the



The 2002 Celebration Home in Stratton Preserve captured the MAME Grand Award, the top honor in the building industry's premier recognition of excellence program.

two are doing EXACTLY what they want to be doing. The performance culture they have created is supported by systems that both men have worked hard to put in place – systems that manage the process and ensure impeccable execution of the vision of creating luxury homes that are among the finest on the market.

In fact, these systems – business principles and corresponding processes – were recognized by *Custom Home Magazine* with the prestigious 2002 Pacesetter Award for Management, a national award given annually to the operation that exceeds the norm in best business practices. At Nichols and Comito, suffice it to say, everything happens

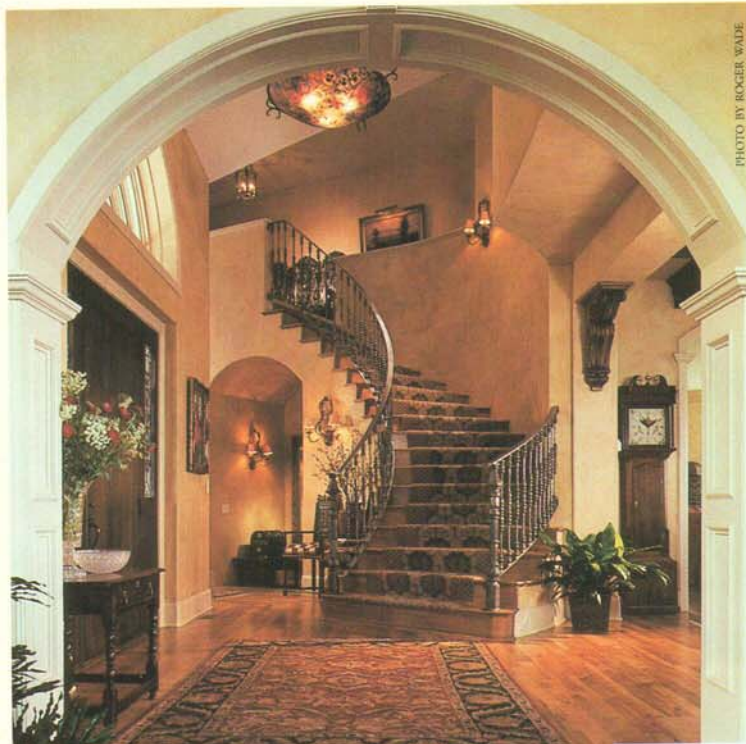


PHOTO BY ROGER WADE

Nichols & Comito homes are found in some of Colorado Springs' most prestigious neighborhoods.

by design.

It all began with friendly competition, Larry arriving from Texas and Claude from upstate New York. Both men were successful in their own right, and both had a background in business and the building industry.

Larry, age 61, who Claude says is "going on 39" came to Colorado Springs in 1969. He had graduated from North Texas State University with a degree in business management, been a stockbroker, a land developer and a part owner of building materials company. In 1982, he looked at the homes being built and didn't see a lot of innovation. "Everything looked pretty typical," he recalls. "I had a few ideas, and I wanted to see if anyone would buy them." Buy them they did – he's been building homes now for 20 years.

Claude, 47, originally from New York where he worked with his father in a successful remodeling and homebuilding business, made his way to Colorado via Utah, after mustering out of the University of Utah, where he explains, he "majored in business, real estate law and skiing – and not necessarily in that order." Coincidentally, about the same time as Larry was beginning to build homes, Claude showed up on the scene. He built his first home in 1983.

The rest, as they say, is history. Between this dynamic duo, they have garnered nearly every honor the home building industry has to offer. And like most great partnerships, together they are greater than the sum of their parts. They have been two of the most respected luxury homebuilders for over 15 years – the past seven as a premiere partnership.

They have combined their individual strengths to do what they do best – and in doing so, built a team that absorbs and reflects their passion and commitment. As managers intimately involved in their business, they divide and conquer: Larry specializes in working with customers, helping them select designs that best fit their lifestyles and budget considerations. Claude excels at quality control, estimating and overseeing actual construction. They both work tirelessly to deliver on customers' expectations and to lead the 15 members of their team on the same pursuit of excellence.

Larry and Claude have amassed numerous awards over the years including "Peoples Choice" awards in The Parade of Homes and industry recognition for product excellence in the annual MAME awards. In 1998 and 1999, Nichols and Comito received the MAME Grand Award, the industry's highest honor, for the most outstanding home of the year. They have been equally committed to the building industry and the community. Before joining forces, each participated often in the Parade of Homes and each has served as president of the Housing and Building Association of Colorado Springs. Over their respective careers, both have been recognized as "Builder of the Year" by the association. Larry continues to serve as a member of the board of directors for the National Association of

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Homebuilders. Claude is responsible for founding The Way Home, a non-profit organization that provides funding for numerous affordable housing programs, including Habitat for Humanity, Partners in Housing, Silver Key

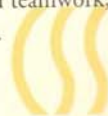


PHOTO BY ROGER WADE

Senior Services and others. Nichols and Comito has also sponsored a showhouse for the past four years that has raised tens of thousands of dollars for the American Cancer Society.

Building a successful business and a rock-solid reputation has allowed the pair to give back to the industry and their community. For any aspiring entrepreneurs seeking to achieve the same lofty heights, they offer a bit of wisdom: "If you're selling a service – you better put your clients first," says Larry. "They drive success or failure." And Claude adds: "Set your goals high – expect to be the best. Work to one simple principle: do what you say you will do."

Nichols and Comito, as partners and as a business, is a study in friendship, in teamwork, and in leadership. The end result is a study in excellence.





MAME winner for Best New Village Home and Best Interior Design, we express our sincere gratitude to Dr. and Mrs. Jack Schiller for selecting Nichols & Comito as their builder.



Distinctive design and superbly crafted custom details are characteristic of every Nichols & Comito home.