

Heart of the Home

For Connie Gordon, building award-winning houses in the Farmington Valley is a family affair.

BY JAMES LATTER

ON FIRST SPEAKING to Connie Gordon, it becomes clear that her business is a family affair.

Just moments after diapering her infant son, the young builder and mother of three talked about her company's award-winning home in Avon, which this year was honored as the Best Hartford County Spec Home in the \$4-5 million class, by the Home Builders Association of Connecticut, Inc. (HBA of CT).

The association's HOBI (Home Building Industry) Awards recognize excellence in new construction, land development, remodeling, sales and marketing and home financing.



The home built by Poirier Homes won a HOBI award from the Home Builders Association of Connecticut.

PHOTO BY STEVEN SCHWARTZ

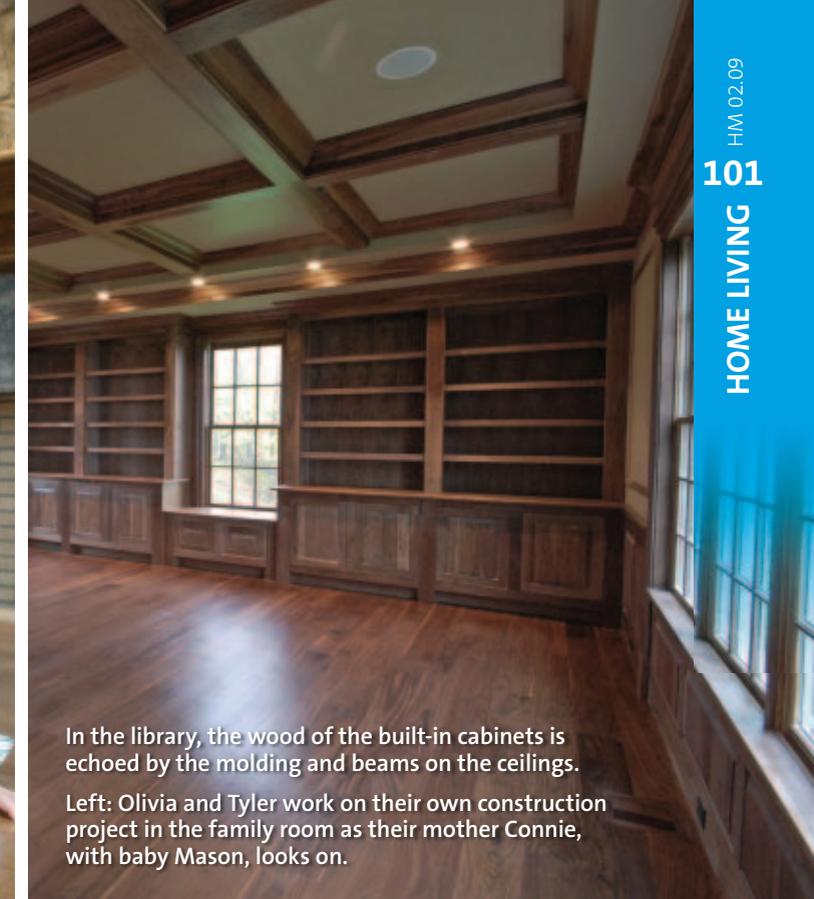


The spacious kitchen has high ceilings, subway-tiled backsplash and ample work surfaces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF POIRIER HOMES AND THE HBA OF CONNECTICUT



PHOTO BY STEVEN SCHWARTZ



In the library, the wood of the built-in cabinets is echoed by the molding and beams on the ceilings. Left: Olivia and Tyler work on their own construction project in the family room as their mother Connie, with baby Mason, looks on.

PHOTO COURTESY OF POIRIER HOMES AND THE HBA OF CONNECTICUT

Created by Poirier Homes LLC, the majestic 9,300-square-foot building, brick-clad and topped by a Vermont slate roof, sits high atop a crest at 6 Deer Ridge Road on Avon Mountain, commanding a panoramic view of the Avon Valley far below it.

Despite its generous dimensions, she and her spouse and business partner, David Gordon, said they haven't based the home's appeal on its size.

"It's not about the size of the home. It's about the quality ... and the craftsmanship and doing it right the first time around," she says, suggesting that the company's unofficial motto could be: "We can sleep at night," since everything is done to create buildings that are well designed and constructed.

"Every house we build, we build like we're going to move into it," David says. "We don't leave anything out that we would have in our own house."

All in all, 2008 was an eventful

year for Connie and her husband. The Avon home was one of three homes they built last year, while also welcoming a new baby. That begs the question: How does Connie juggle such a heavy load of work responsibilities with the demands of three young children?

"I've always brought them along with me to the worksite," she says with a shrug and a big smile. "They enjoy coming to work with me. They can run around and play, and Tyler likes to bring his tool belt, so he can 'work' too. It helps that the contractors usually try to make them a part of it – they ask if the kids would like to hold a tool, or hand them the measuring tape."

Like their children – Tyler, 6, Olivia, 2, and Mason, four months – the stunning Avon structure is a true co-production of Connie (née Poirier) and her husband, who both seem to have building in their blood.

Connie, who has a degree in Interior Design and Drafting from

Brook College, in Long Beach, CA, has been designing and building homes in the Greater Hartford area for more than 13 years. David has been building homes and managing properties in the area for more than nine years.

Years ago, David's father Richard was a noted commercial developer of skyscrapers in Hartford. Now semi-retired, he bought the prime 4.3-acre property on Avon Mountain about 25 years ago, as part of a larger parcel.

Connie discovered her love of building at the tender age of 11, when her father Martin, who was also in the construction industry, built his first home. Right away, she says, "I knew that this is what I wanted to do." Now 35, she formed her own company when she was only 23. Later, David became her partner.

Together, the couple has built homes that have won a string of HBA of CT awards for spec homes. A spec home is one that a

builder constructs without having a contracted buyer for it.

Designed by Rob Fish, of Farmington-based Robert Fish and Associates, the home that the Gordons call a "traditional colonial" seems warm and inviting, despite its ample size.

Light streams into the white-walled interior from a multitude of windows. Beautifully-grained white oak floors adorn most of the rooms, a notable exception being the handsome library, which is replete with American walnut.

Like the oak, the walnut has been carefully selected to keep knots to a minimum, which is an aesthetic preference.

From the front foyer, there is a clear, unobstructed line of sight and passage, through the living room to the very back of the building, and to the sweeping view beyond. From the library at that end, a corridor runs the entire length of the house in the opposite direction,

extending right to the kitchen.

Modern, yet somehow antique-looking, cabinets, with beaded insets, give the spacious kitchen a relaxed, comfortable feel. The countertops – including that of the large centre island – are topped with gleaming Juparana Persia granite. Many high-end Viking appliances, like the dual fuel range, are within easy reach.

Adjoining the kitchen on one side is a butler's pantry, with a wine fridge, dishwasher and sink. At the other end, there's a handy mud room with cubicles, where people can neatly place their boots, shoes, and jackets – and next to that, a four-bay garage, with custom carriage doors.

Also on the first floor is the family room, which is flanked by large palladium windows and a lovely rock mosaic fireplace. It is one of five fireplaces throughout the house, all of which are plumbed for use with propane gas, but can also burn wood.

The family room, like the library, features a coffered ceiling, with its recessed and intersecting square panels forming a distinctive ornament overhead.

An elegant curving staircase gracefully ascends from the main foyer to the second floor. There, you find the cozy family room, the master bathroom, and master bedroom. The latter is accented by a decorative tray ceiling, its edges bordered by soft, indirect lighting.

Another fireplace, made with white Carrera marble, visually complements the snow white wall that it emerges from. Above the mantle, the wiring for a plasma television and speakers for a surround sound system are already in place.

The family room is also set up for surround sound, and there are speakers all through the house, with wiring ready to distribute the output from an audio and video system.

As younger builders, the Gordons feel that they "under-



PHOTO COURTESY OF POIRIER HOMES AND THE HBA OF CONNECTICUT

The soaking tub provides the ultimate in relaxation, along with amazing views of the Farmington Valley.

stand the new technology coming out,” in ways that some builders do not grasp.

For example, the technology behind “Smart Homes” allows owners to program their houses. “Say you’re away from home; you can basically control your home from your computer, and turn the heat on and off,” says David. “There are also cameras you can have, to watch over your house.”

Near the master bedroom, a deep white marble tub, with polished chrome fixtures and water jets, is the master bathroom’s focal point. Raised off the floor, it provides an inspiring view through a trio of windows.

Radiant heat will warm the marble flooring, and a separate, glass-doored shower could accommodate a crowd if necessary, with its roomy tiled interior and multiple spraying heads. There’s

even a steam unit built right in.

Just around the corner, there is a huge walk-in closet. Storage spaces are plentiful in the home, including closets and cabinets galore. The well-appointed laundry room is also on this level, as are rooms that children could play in.

Above the upper foyer, on the third floor, there’s another large attractive room which could be used as a sixth bedroom. There’s a full bathroom too, one of six in the house, which also has two half-bathrooms.

Outside of the building, one of the first things you notice is the weathered brick, which came from the demolition of another house. “These bricks are over 100 years old,” David says. “It’s good ... because of the environment. We try to recycle as much as we can.”

The Energy Star windows

were selected to save energy and expense, while increasing the home’s comfort level.

The attractive and durable slate roof – studded with copper snow guards to break up snow and ice, and fitted with a copper rain gutter system and subtly concealed lightning rods – will last more than 100 years, the builder says, and other materials have also been chosen for longevity.

“We think it’s the most beautiful roof you can put on a house,” he adds.

Durability is also built into the four columns supporting a small terrace above the main entry door out front. The columns look like wood, but are actually made of fiberglass and will not rot. “It’s pretty maintenance free,” he says of the structure. “The only thing you have to paint is the shutters.”

Walking around the property

reveals the significant extent to which the land was filled in and leveled off with soil to create a flatter and higher lot – partly to enhance the magnificent view from the back.

From that vantage point, you also notice other design flourishes, like the outdoor blue stone patios that adjoin the family room and the kitchen.

The Gordons noted the attention to detail and their

commitment to quality that makes this home stand out.

Inside, the elegant trim package includes decorative crown moldings, soffited ceilings, and wainscoting. The doors are all solid wood. Ceiling heights – which are often nine feet tall in many newly constructed homes – are 10 feet and higher here.

Exterior walls are made of 2 x 6-inch wood, rather than the 2 x 4s that are so commonly used

in construction, David said. R-21 rather than R-13 insulation was also used, he says, adding that the house is not only more energy-efficient than most but also more structurally sound.

“There are a lot of builders who cut corners that we refuse to,” he says. “We’ve never done it.”

“This is truly a custom home,” Connie adds. “It’s a home that David and I put a lot of effort into, to make it the home it is today.”

Connie and David Gordon with their children – Tyler, Olivia and baby Mason.



PHOTO BY STEVEN SCHWARTZ