

# Hands-On Architect Builds On Role As House Designer

## HOME IS 'PIECE OF ART' AND TOOL TO EDUCATE

By LIZ BLEAU  
ebleau@tampatrib.com

**RUSKIN** — Any architect can design a house.

But Mike Calvino hasn't merely designed the home taking shape on a tree-shaded waterfront lot on Canal Street overlooking Tampa Bay. He's also building it with his own hands — every wall, floor, fixture and door. He's building all the eucalyptus cabinets and latches, the floor inlays, the swimming pool and the 52-foot cypress laminate beams that will give the house much of its innovative character.

When completed in about a year, the house will have been five years in the making.

Even without its signature roof, the home is drawing interest in architectural circles.

A group of area architects toured the house Saturday, after others had made their way out to see Calvino's work.

Steve Cooke, an associate professor at the University of Florida's School of Architecture and Design, said it's unusual for an architect to take such a hands-on approach for a client.

"It's not unusual for an architect to be the general contractor for a project. Some firms contract to do that, to deliver a whole package. But they have separate divisions for doing that. Very few architects are doing what Mike is doing."

The house is important for the region, Cooke said, not just because of the process.

"This is a piece of art," he said. "He is building the house like a sculptor would build. And it's hard to find a client willing to agree to the process."

Much of what is being built in the area today, Cooke said, are so-called "McMansions" that allow for little creative exploration.

"Most architecture today is like the food at McDonald's. It's comfortable. There is no risk. You know what you are going to get," he said.

The house Calvino is building "can educate the public on the deeper issues of architecture, of how a house flows and relates to the site," he said.



Tribune photo by JIM REED

Few architects are doing what Mike Calvino is — designing and building a home on Canal Street overlooking Tampa Bay. Calvino is preparing to build laminate beams that will lend character.

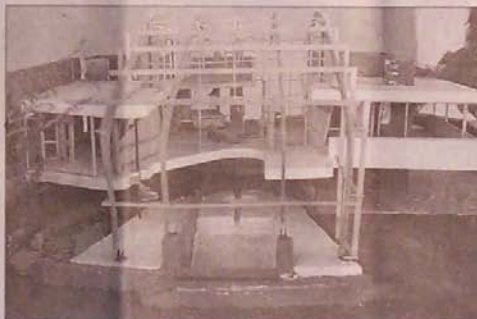
## ALMOST HOME

- ◆ Stan Woodruff and Sharon Collier of Sun City plan on moving in next year, a five-year wait for completion.
- ◆ There will be about 2,000 square feet of air-conditioned space and 10,000 square feet of interior space, roof decks and porches.
- ◆ Fifty-two-foot cypress laminate beams, which will create a distinctive roof, will protrude 19 feet over the front entry.
- ◆ The kitchen cabinets will be milled from a eucalyptus tree a Tampa homeowner did not want.
- ◆ The same eucalyptus will be used for inlaid flooring and handmade bed and shelves in the master bedroom.

Calvino's clients are Stan Woodruff and his wife, Sharon Collier, of Sun City.

Woodruff said an artist they know recommended Calvino.

"Mike came out to the site, and I explained we wanted a simple house with split bedrooms and living space in the middle," he said. "He went to his studio and came up with this house out of 'Star Wars.' Until I saw the model, I hadn't realized how talented he was. There is nothing he can't do." Woodruff said he and his



Tribune photo by JIM REED

The house — which will be finished in about a year, five years in the making — is drawing the interest of several architects.

wife were willing to wait, even though they knew the house would take years.

"Every time he does something, he surprises me," Woodruff said, "and it's always a 'wow.' I've looked at a lot of homes and a lot of unique homes, but I have not seen one that compares to this one."

Calvino, 33, lives in south Tampa with his wife, Elaine, and daughter, Mary, 2.

He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Florida and worked in architectural offices in New York City and Tampa while designing and building furniture on the side.

He grew up in Longwood, outside of Orlando.

He said his mother noticed at an early age that he had a lot of patience.

"I guess that's why I can stay on one project for a long time," he said.

Calvino is preparing to build the laminate beams that will give the home much of its character. The beams will protrude 19 feet over the front entry, where an elevated circular drive will bring people to a second-story entrance.

Much of the house is concrete and steel, which he said can give a home a cold feel. That's why he's adding impor-



Tribune photo by ROBERT BURKE

Sharon Collier and husband Stan Woodruff go over blueprints with Calvino. "There is nothing he can't do," Woodruff says.

tant wooden touches.

"It's the wood and glass detail, especially the wood, that brings the human scale and tactile quality, the warmth," he said. "It's the wood, especially the exotic woods, that bring the grain, color, smell to a project. To me, that's the human interface."

The house will have about 2,000 square feet of air-conditioned space and 10,000 square feet total of interior space, roof decks and porches.

The roof beams will be made from cypress, shaped and then glued and bolted together to form an arc similar to those seen in churches and other larger structures.

Calvino built a scaled-down version of the laminate beams on a small guest house alongside the main house.

That structure, Woodruff said, convinced him of Calvino's creativity.

A concrete slab on the property was not structurally sound enough to support a building, so Calvino built the guesthouse over the slab and supported it with steel trusses perched on top of concrete towers. The trusses hold the cypress laminate beams, which add color and character.

Calvino said he has always liked to build things.

He has learned the basics of construction, and in 2000, he earned his general contractor's license. He said some of the skills he uses in home building he learned while working on cars.

"I've always tinkered with cars and rebuilt carburetors

and that kind of mechanical stuff," he said.

He created the iron grillwork for the railings on the balcony, poured the concrete for the foundation and the pool, and built the iron trusses for the roof.

He also will build the kitchen cabinets out of eucalyptus wood milled from a tree a Tampa homeowner no longer wanted. The eucalyptus also will become part of the inlaid flooring and handmade eucalyptus bed and shelves in the master bedroom.

The roof beams will be sculpted to curve so they let rain flow off the roof and give the house "the elegance I want," Calvino said.

Woodruff said he believes Calvino will be famous one day.

"My friends call him Mike Lloyd Wright," he said, referring to the famous early 20th-century American architect. "But Wright never did it all like Mike does. He keeps sending furniture he designs to someone in California who wants him to come out there someday and build a house for the furniture. I figure once that happens, we will lose him and he will really catch on."

Until then, Woodruff is happy to have Calvino creating a house of exceptional quality built by someone who loves what he does.

"I never saw anyone as happy doing what they are doing as Mike is," he said.

Reporter Liz Bleau can be reached at (813) 633-4323.