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Knowledge, Love, Adversity  
Lead to Zander Homes' Inception

Zander Homes | Houston, Texas



# Knowledge, Love, Adversity Lead to Zander Homes' Inception

**By Kathy Bowen Stolz**

It was a knowledge of building, the love of a woman and the downturn of an economy that led to Justin Henry starting Zander Homes™, a custom builder in Houston.

First, the knowledge of building started when Justin was just a kid working on his dad's construction crews back in their home state of Ohio. His dad Rick headed his own framing crews as well as later being a supervisor for Ryland Homes, one of the nation's largest builders. Justin began by picking up trash on job sites, stacking material and driving an occasional nail into some piece of lumber at age 12 on his father's jobsites. "If I wanted any type of money to buy clothes, I could help him," Justin stated.

"At that time working for my dad just seemed to be a way to earn some extra cash, but I was learning invaluable lessons in commitment, integrity and hard work. My understanding and responsibilities of construction grew over time as I continued to develop my homebuilding skills even during the summers of my college years at Austin Peay in Tennessee."

He returned home after college and began working in the

building industry, but the economy in southwestern/central Ohio was not very strong or stable at the time.

About then was when he met his future wife Gaby, who was a native Houstonian.

Justin relocated to Houston and joined some of the largest and most reputable homebuilders in Texas as well as a small boutique custom builder in Houston's inner-loop. Although he envisioned working his way up through the ranks of the company, he lost his job during the economic downturn, which ultimately changed his trajectory.

Justin then began to work for a local cabinet company as a territory manager while also starting Zander Homes & Remodeling in 2010. He started out primarily doing remodeling because he saw it as his only way into the ultra-competitive building industry.

"Homebuilding demands are very capital-intensive, which I didn't have at that time. Remodeling not only helped us to create a name brand, but aided in building up capital to invest into our first new build," he stated.

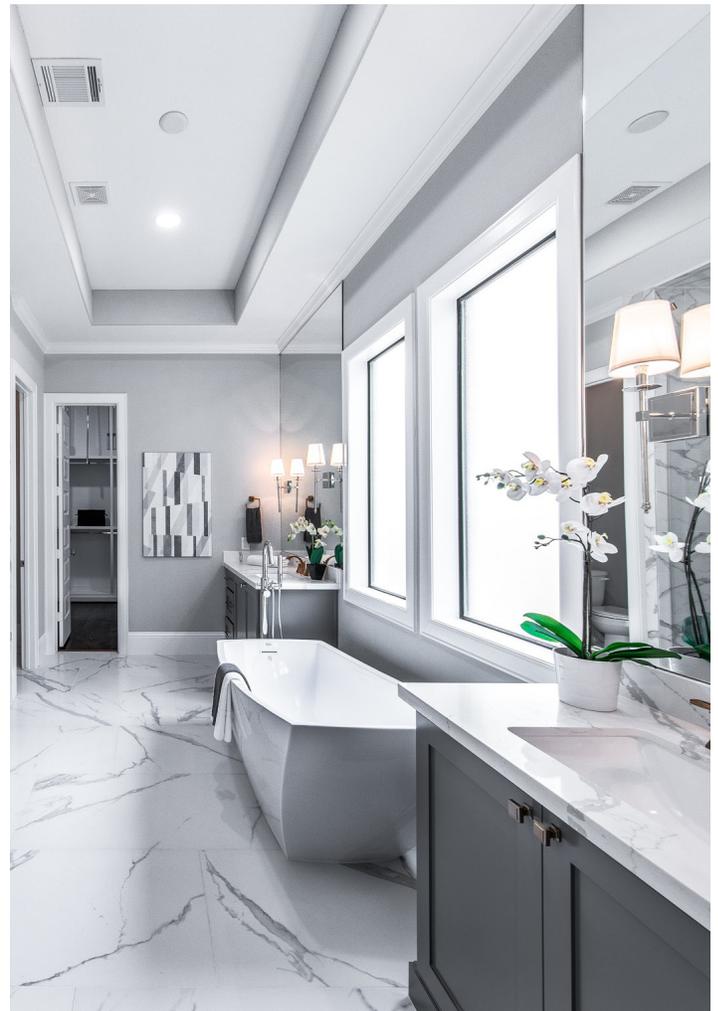


He chose the name Zander because “the company and my first-born son, Alexander, came about the same time. The name Zander was a perfect fit for us personally and professionally, considering that the name Alexander means ‘defender of man/helper,’ and our goal was to provide a great service to people and to help them build their dream homes.”

Two years later, when building his first home for sale, he changed the company name to Zander Homes™, and, after four years of juggling both jobs, he was able to become a full-time builder, paying himself for the first time. Seven years later, he even talked his dad into moving to Houston and joining the company – just before Hurricane Harvey hit!

These days Henry said his award-winning company build 8-10 homes a year, primarily with Build on Your Lot custom homes, with their trademarked slogan “We Build Where You Live™.” As well as developing their own land and constructing townhome projects inside of Houston’s inner-loop, the company’s “sweet spot” is a single-family home of 3,000-3,500 sq. ft. in the \$155/sq. ft. price range.

Zander Homes’™ clients are typically price-conscious professionals who also expect quality and good service, Justin stated. “While we’re rarely anybody’s first choice, which we’re okay with, we do strive to make them feel like we were their best choice when their home is completed.”





Henry said that pricing transparency, which is part of the company’s blog “Build on Your Lot Houston” (see [www.zanderhomes.net](http://www.zanderhomes.net)), has helped drive most of his business to Zander Homes™ .

He added, “Zander Homes™ tries to build the highest quality custom homes at a very competitive price. We’re offering a better, tangible value” than many builders.

“It takes a lot of money and faith to build a custom home. I don’t care who you are. I understand that people are relying on us to not only save them money, but to guide them throughout the entire building process. We try to educate our buyers on what drives the cost of a house and what changes can affect cost. We’re here to do a good job. We care. We truly, truly do care about educating our buyers about quality while striving to do a good job ourselves.”

The Greater Houston Builders Association, the Texas Association of Builders, Houzz and others have recognized the quality of Zander Homes™ with various awards since 2014 (see company website for a list).

Justin finds his personal background in construction to be “super advantageous” for a custom homebuilder. “We rarely build the same plan twice. We’re always trying to figure out something new on a plan, design change or even land constraints. Sometimes it gets really crazy and convoluted. Our customers rely on us to be the expert at a hundred different things, which – while challenging – is very rewarding and fun!”



Justin added that transparent communication and learning to choose the right clients are other key components to being a successful builder. “Building a house is in most ways, like a marriage. The buyer and the builder interact every day or at least every other day. As the builder you must understand what the buyer is trying to communicate. “We are striving to understand our clients’ “why” for doing something. If we can better understand this part, then we can accomplish making their dreams a reality!”

Justin also expressed the importance of having the right team of employees. His team includes Alfred Young, vice president of construction; Reid Wiggins and Rick Henry (his dad) as construction managers; and Tanessia Hamilton as the team’s construction administrator.

“Hiring really good individuals early was important. As an entrepreneur, you’re always asking yourself ‘if I can afford him.’ But hiring good people has helped us grow the company to what it is today. One really good person can make all the difference. I now see my role as owner is to support them, versus them helping me,” Justin said.



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