

Premises, Premises

Making sure the house you design gets its due

By Joan Capelin, Hon. AIA, FSMPS

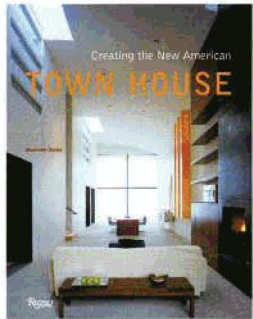
How to succeed as a residential architect? Here are the experiences, perspectives, and advice of five flourishing New York architects of single-family houses and three savvy editors.

Part 1: Residential stars

Housing seer Sarah Susanka, FAIA, asked an AIA audience in 2005: "How do you explain the success of the few residentially oriented firms whose workload is steadily increasing and whose financial status is robust?" Well, Sarah, here's how New York's best do it:

Ben Baxt, AIA, says his "young office" of 11 professionals is "small because partner Michael Ingui, AIA, and I stay intimately involved in each project." Working first from his Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, house, he realized that "once you have an office outside of your home, it legitimizes you." A developer neighbor recommended Baxt for the first non-moonlighting houses he did. His firm is also very visible through its advocacy work in the community: Ingui for the Gowanus Canal, and Baxt for historic preservation.

Alex Gorlin, FAIA, whose office does 80% residential work, started out with a house for fashion editor Grace Mirabella, met improbably through a mutual acquaintance who was interested in Le Corbusier, about whom Gorlin had written. That house went into *Architectural Digest* and, well, we all know the drill. "Today I understand you plan this all out," Gorlin comments. After doing some townhouses in Seaside, Florida, he wrote a book on townhouses for Rizzoli and other books, though "doing a book is tough," he says. "Oddly enough, I don't think I've gotten a project from a book – but someone else did because his house was on my book cover."

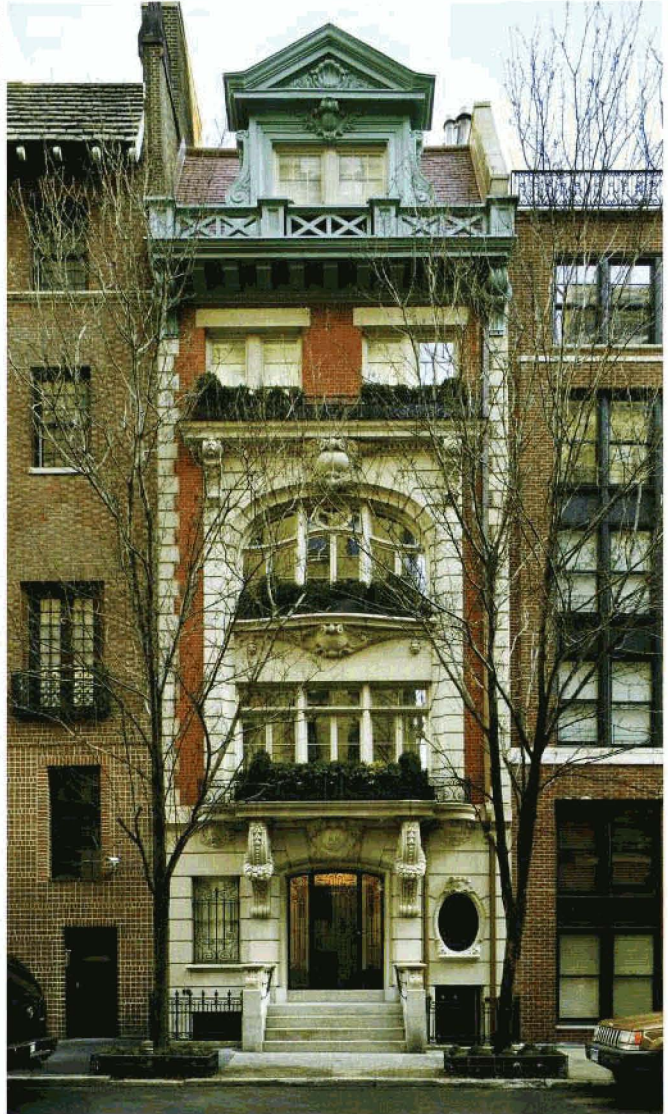


Two books on townhouses cemented Alex Gorlin's reputation in this specialty

James Harb's business is half residential projects. A project for a gallery owner in Chelsea jumpstarted his work when he moved to New York. The *New York Times* Magazine recently gave Harb's latest art-filled project royal treatment. He admits he should have spent more time getting published in any way possible. "Then you have a portfolio to show," he says.

Peter Pennoyer, AIA, started out designing the house of a friend's parents, a nice twist on the usual story. That good-luck house was for author Louis Auchincloss, who wrote about the process in *Architectural Digest*, so the house was greatly anticipated and published further. Pennoyer, who interned at the Landmarks Commission and worked for Robert A.M. Stern Architects before going to graduate school, is today an acknowledged scholar in classical architecture. He

JONATHAN WALLEN



Peter Pennoyer's reputation for residential design includes his knowledge of historic preservation

leads a combined design and, with Anne Walker, preservation research office of 30. He says there is "an absolute relationship between our writing and the continuing work."

Bart Voorsanger, FAIA, won a National AIA award for his first house. Obviously special, the project nonetheless must have angered some god, since the owners divorced, the contractor went bankrupt, and someone was killed. "You have many roles that are not explained in architecture school," Voorsanger understates. His 24-person office has a range of work, including three or four houses a year, one of them 45,000 square feet. "These people are important," Voorsanger observes. "You have to listen to them; you can't go on autopilot." His advice: "Get published, get awards, and get onto Google."

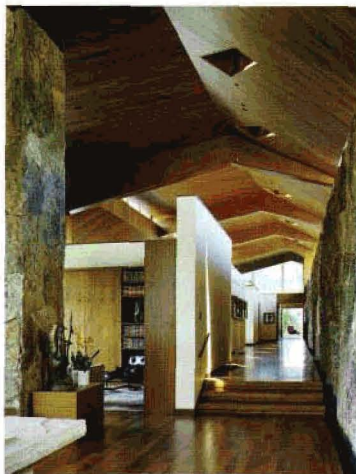
Part 2: Editorial stars

Architectural Record's Special Sections Editor Jane Kolleeny, responsible for the magazine's housing coverage, always scouts for good work. She's also a national juror for the AIA Housing Committee's design awards. *Record's* "House of the Month" and other website features are read more than the magazine, thus providing great exposure.

But although *Record's* website has careful instructions about sending information and visuals by mail, some architects transmit huge files that crash her computer. This does not sit well. Besides, *Record's* printer is strictly utilitarian, she says, so anything it prints will be of lower quality than the editorial group wants to see. "How can they design a house if they can't submit materials?" she ponders.

Barbara Dixon is constantly in motion as editorial director of the Cottages & Gardens Publications. "We're about ideas, not price point," she says; copy focuses on a very distinct audience. Her experienced advice: "Everything is about contacts." "You have to be an extrovert. 'Drive by' every function." "It's always show time." "Get in and get out, say what you have to say, and don't drone on ... and on."

Meghan Drueding, who is senior editor at Hanley-Wood's *Residential Architect* and *Custom Home*, scours local magazines like *Texas Architect*, *San Diego Home & Garden*, and the *Charlotte Observer's* "House of the Month." Sometimes awards competitions also show the non-winning entries. "Just because it didn't win doesn't mean it's not of merit or interest to us." Drueding expects to find your work – and you personally – at programs like the Boston Society of Architects' Residential Design Convention or on house tours.



PAUL WARCHOL

Voorsanger Architects: The Wildcat Residence in Snowmass, Colorado, has won three awards and one medal, and has been published in *Innovative Home*, *Western Interiors & Design*, *H.O.M.E.*, and *Wired*

Part 3: Principles in reputation development

- Don't get stressed out about your public relations. You are reaching for only three things: visibility, credibility, and access to people who can help you advance. Decide which one you want, and build your campaign accordingly.
- Don't stop thinking about tomorrow. Now that you're published, now that the book is in the stores, there's always something more you can do. Are you in *Architectural Digest*, for instance? Then shoot to join The AD 100 list of top architects.
- Do get permission from the client before you talk about your work together.
- Do get to know the neighbors. Wids DeLaCour, AIA, co-chair of the AIANY Chapter's Housing Committee, did a house for his family in Brooklyn Heights. Word of mouth got him into affordable housing.
- Do have the courage to get published. According to British columnist Ian Martin, "The First Law of Journalism is not 'seek out the truth' – it's 'fill the space.'"

Part 4: Best ideas

Nowadays, everyone – repeat, everyone – sifts through the Internet to consider their options. "It establishes a comfort level," says Baxt. Drueding quantifies: "Seventy percent of the time, that's how we find the people we write about." Dixon wants to see your face: "People want to see what you look like and relate to you."

- There are more than 500 firms listed in AIANY's firm directory that do residential design, according to Member Services Director Suzanne Mecs. She advises that you make sure AIA links to your website, and that you have a current, hard-copy portfolio in the Center for Architecture's library.
- If you need help, ask for it, from a mentor or a public relations firm.
- To join the AIA's quarterly home-design trends survey panel of 500 residential architecture firms, contact Jennifer Riskus at jriskus@aia.org. You won't be named, but you can find many ways to use the information.
- No programs that suit you? Then start a mall show, an exhibit sponsored by a local paper, or a house tour.

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U.S. publications that cover single-family houses:

<i>Architect</i>	<i>Log Home Living</i>
<i>Architect's Newspaper</i>	<i>Metropolis</i>
<i>Architectural Digest</i>	<i>Metropolitan Home</i>
<i>Architectural Record</i>	<i>Modern Homes</i>
<i>Architectural West</i>	<i>New Small Homes</i>
<i>Builder/Architect</i>	<i>New York Spaces</i>
<i>Coastal Living</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
<i>Contract</i>	<i>New York Times Sunday Magazine</i>
<i>Custom Home</i>	<i>POPLife</i>
<i>Development New York</i>	<i>Premier House Plans</i>
<i>Domino</i>	<i>Residential Architect</i>
<i>Dwell</i>	<i>Residential Design & Build</i>
<i>Elle Décor</i>	<i>Surface</i>
<i>Fine Homebuilding</i>	<i>Ultimate Home Design</i>
<i>Green Builder Magazine</i>	<i>Vogue Living</i>
<i>Hammer Magazine</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal: Home Front</i>
<i>Hamptons</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal: Weekend Marketplace</i>
<i>Hamptons Cottages & Gardens</i>	<i>Western Interiors & Design</i>
<i>House Beautiful</i>	
<i>Innovative Home</i>	
<i>Interior Design</i>	
<i>Interiors and Sources</i>	