

BALA Design Trends and Photos: Simplicity and Exquisite Details



This Italian villa, a BALA gold winning one-of-a-kind custom home, sits atop a hill near Pittsburgh. Photo by Beth Singer Photography

Simplicity of form inside and out and exquisitely detailed custom homes that bring the outdoors in are among the six design trends noted in the [2009 Best in American Living Awards](#) (BALA) — the nation's foremost residential design competition — according to judges who analyzed the hundreds of BALA entries submitted.

Other hot trends seen in the BALA entries and discussed during a press conference at the [International Builders' Show](#) in Las Vegas earlier this year include:

- Creative, contemporary solutions for rental projects
- Infill projects that target specific market niches
- Green technology that is more effectively integrated with quality architectural design
- A wide variety of architectural styles, but less regionalism

A total of 67 winners in 37 categories were selected in the BALA competition, many of which exemplified one or more of the trends noted by the judges. The six major trends include:



The villa's kitchen. *Photo by Beth Singer Photographer*

A Wide Variety of Architectural Styles, But Less Regionalism

Victorian, craftsman, contemporary and a host of other styles were represented in the 2009 BALA awards entries. However, the styles were not confined to their traditional regions.



This is Pittsburgh? *Photo by Beth Singer Photographer*

For instance, one winning entry, a 10,000-square-foot Italian villa that sits atop a 36-acre hilltop site and gives its owners panoramic views of the rolling equestrian countryside, was near Pittsburgh. The Italian villa is the primary residence for a busy professional couple and their four active children, as well as a destination for entertaining extended family and friends and hosting formal and informal events of all sizes.



The Neathermeade residence. *Photo by Don Pearse Photography*

In the Philadelphia suburb of Downingtown where modern architecture and weekend getaways aren't the norm, one winning 3,000-square-foot home successfully combined old-world artisanship with high-tech construction techniques.

A 15-foot plateline in the home lends itself to unique yet classic ceiling treatments. Floor-to-ceiling glass hung from the structure's steel exoskeleton melds the modern interior with its rolling, open five-acre lot.

To add texture and warmth, the main living area has a suspended birch ceiling that conceals the mechanicals and the master bedroom and library feature barn-plank American walnut floors.



The Neathermeade residence. *Photo by Don Pearse Photography*

The judges also noted that the 2009 entries featured more examples of authentic architecture and fewer eclectic designs.

Exquisitely Detailed Custom Homes That Bring the Outdoors In

From a 1,136-square-foot guest house to a 12,000-square-foot estate, the BALA-winning custom homes exhibit superb craftsmanship and an innovative use of materials. They also break down the barriers between indoor and outdoor living space.



The BALA Home of the Year. *Photo by David Dietric.*

For example, the Neathermead residence, a custom home in Asheville, N.C., also chosen as the BALA Home of the Year, embodies these trends with a design that is clean-lined and modern on the outside, yet warm and inviting inside.

Local artisans used locally available materials — such as cypress, walnut and wormy chestnut — to give the interior its honey-colored tones. Core living spaces are organized around a large, glass-enclosed, indoor-outdoor pavilion for dining, relaxing and entertaining.



Honey-colored tones are prominent in the BALA Home of the Year. *Photo by David Dietrich*

Detailed with a seamless transition between indoor and outdoor living spaces, the home embodies a harmonious marriage of sustainability and top-drawer architectural design. Its simple geometric forms and uncluttered interiors also have widespread appeal for today's home buyers, the judges noted.



The BALA Home of the Year features a seamless transition between indoor and outdoor living spaces. *Photo by David Dietrich*

In Scottsdale, Ariz., the Bridge House, a custom home nestled between a pair of mountain slopes, is comprised of two distinct masses — a steel, glass and stucco pavilion that rests lightly on desert ground and a stone, masonry and glass module that is dug into the hillside like a fortress.



The Bridge House. *Photo by Timmerman Photography*

Visitors approaching the home view it sequentially while ascending a 90-foot elevation change before arriving at the home's motor court, where the two distinct elements of the home frame dramatic mountain views.



The Bridge House. *Photo by Timmerman Photography*

Creative, Contemporary Solutions for Rental Projects

Rental developments packed plenty of design punch that was often aimed at Generation Y, the key demographic group also known as the millennials who are generally in or fresh out of college and starting to put down roots, according to the judges.



The Eitel Building City Apartments.

Exemplifying this design trend is the [Eitel Building City Apartments](#) in Minneapolis, a mixture of new construction and historic renovation that creates a chic hotel atmosphere.



The Arthouse at Keller Center. *Photo by Steve Hinds Photography*

Another example, the [Arthouse at Keller Center](#) in Keller, Texas, a mixed-use project with a contemporary flavor, targets a diverse group of renters, including young professionals, singles, empty nesters and couples without children. Arthouse was designed to be compatible with the existing town center and to create a neighborhood commerce center where small-business owners could live above their office/retail space.



Canopy. *Photo by Taylor Architectural Photography*

Aesthetics weren't ignored in affordable rental communities that follow this trend, the judges noted. [Canopy](#) in Gainesville, Fla., sites attractive three-story buildings among mature oak trees and features an upscale amenities package that is extremely appealing to its targeted young renters.



The Preserve, one of New Orleans' first post-Katrina ventures into multi-income housing. *Photo by Southern Lights Studio*

And [The Preserve](#) apartments in New Orleans takes its design cues from the neighborhood's mix of industrial architecture and historic New Orleans homes.

Green Technology That Is More Effectively Integrated With Quality Architectural Design

Aesthetics have taken their place alongside sustainability, according to the BALA judges. The awards for Best Green-Built Home went to a historic Florida cottage, a rustic single-family home in New Hampshire and a dazzling contemporary home in the Nevada desert.



Codding Cottage. *Photo by McCourtney Photographers*

Codding Cottage is a sophisticated example of sustainable design and building practices. The deep-roof overhangs shelter windows from the high, hot sun and a generous number of large windows and French doors allow for passive ventilation.

Among the many new green technologies used in the cottage are bio-based sprayed foam insulation in the attic and framed walls; a 22 SEER multi-zoned HVAC system; a solar PV system; and a 1,240-gallon rainwater cistern that captures runoff to irrigate the drought-tolerant landscaping.



ABODE green model home. *Photo by Rixon Photography*

In New Hampshire, [ABODE](#) builders of Plymouth, N.H., blended stick-built and modular construction to create its winning 1,680-square-foot green model home — from foundation to window treatments — in just 31 days.

The home is 5+ [Energy Star](#)-rated and certified Gold through [Build Green NH](#). Said one judge, “I would buy this house even if it wasn’t green.”



The New American Home. *Photo by James F. Wilson*

Sustainability was central to the design of the 2009 New American Home in Las Vegas, which consumes near net-zero energy and is certified Gold under the [National Green Building Program](#).

The home achieved 76% whole-house energy savings because of such features as insulated concrete forms; an unvented, sealed attic; a 56-panel solar PV system; spray foam insulation; tankless water heaters; low-e windows; and passive solar design that maximizes natural light while minimizing direct solar heat gain.

Infill Projects That Target Specific Market Niches

Infill housing has been one of the bright spots in the battered real-estate market of the last few years. Working in tandem with local municipalities and planning officials, builders and designers have created marketable solutions for all kinds of sites, both urban and suburban.



Celsius 44. Photo by Craig Cozart Photography

[Celsius 44](#), in the Riverfront Warehouse District of Petaluma, Calif., has become a big hit with young professionals — offering loft-style condos and townhomes and close proximity to the city center.

The homes feature generously proportioned spaces, upscale standard features and loft-style enhancements such as exposed ductwork. The exterior architecture synthesizes characteristics of turn-of-the-century industrial and agricultural buildings with simple rectangular shapes, long gable roof forms, large openings and catwalks.



Traymore of Rose Valley. Photo by Don Pearse Photographers

In contrast, [Traymore](#) in Rose Valley, Pa., entices empty nesters with its arts and crafts style carriage homes that pay homage to Rose Valley's history and preserve the site's natural beauty.

The architecture respects Rose Valley's artistic legacy through its simple lines, deep-roof overhangs, decorative brackets and numerous arts and crafts details.

Simplicity of Form Inside and Out

Historic, geometric shapes and forms were prevalent in many of the award-winning projects, according to the BALA judges, no doubt because they appeal to a broader spectrum of buyers.



Plan 1, The Classics at Miramonte. *Photo by Christopher Mayer*

A winning example is Plan 1, a shingle-style home at [The Classics at Miramonte](#) in Mountain View, Calif., that captures the flavor of California neighborhoods of the 1920s and 1930s. The efficiently designed space features an alley-loaded, two-car garage and private yard; a centralized kitchen with an island and eating bar; and a private courtyard off the dining room for intimate outdoor living.

The judges also noted that, as part of a trend to simplicity, many interiors in the 2009 competition had fewer additions, such as trim and wall treatments, and placed more emphasis on natural light and views.



Private residence in Eads, Tenn. *Photo by Looney Ricks Kiss Architects*

One winning entry, a custom home in Eads, Tenn., was sited with minimal street impact in a neighborhood designed to preserve the natural environment. The home captures views on three sides and while its design features a mid-19th century Tennessee image and character, its easy-living plan supports the owner's active lifestyle.

Instead of being parallel to the street, the home is sited along a perpendicular axis that allows it to show its modest face to the public, it resembles an older home with additions made over time.