



ONE BEAUTY AT A TIME

Homes by James, Inc. owner James Malapanes takes great pleasure in building houses with character.

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OPPOSITE PAGE: The conservatory's ceiling and wall glass panels reveal lakefront views in all directions. The flooring is blue chinois aged stone adding to the "outdoor" feel of the "indoor" space. **TOP:** The inspiration for the entry foyer floor design was brought forth by the owner. Carrera and Thassos marble is bordered by a curved 7 inch band of Carrera butting up to hardwood floors fashioned in a herringbone pattern. The curved walls have custom, radius moldings. The curved staircase with wrought iron railings leads up to a beautiful curved balcony. **LEFT:** Homes by James, Inc. owner Jim Malapanes **ABOVE:** The library's cabinetry has curved door and drawer fronts with pilasters that separate the windows. Recessed motorized blinds allow privacy. The flooring is 6 inch white oak in a herringbone pattern with a slight beveled edge and a wire brushed finish.

By mid-morning on a quiet weekday, Jim Malapanes' most recently completed house project is abuzz with activity. Workers are carefully laying paving stones around the curving walkway, landscapers are putting the finishing touches on the front garden and at the side entrance, locksmiths are busily working on a series of doors. Rising above us, the house itself stands in full, finished glory, a curvaceous beauty, clad in limestone and field-

stone, her slate roof pointed and peaked with towers and turrets. And the views through her ample torso show the glittering blue of Lake Michigan beyond.

"Curvaceous is right!" laughs Malapanes, owner of Homes by James, Inc., and affectionately known as "Builder Jim" or even "JTB," for short. "This house is full of curves—curved walls, radius walls, multiple two-story rooms with round turrets, towers and domed ceilings, curved staircases and balconies, a curved bar. Even the pool house has curved glass doors."

Building a 20,000-square foot house on the lake with such curvilinear complexity has been challenging,



LEFT: Living room: 20 feet tall curved bay windows soar to a barreled ceiling revealing gorgeous lake views. Completing the room is fine crafted millwork, an Indiana buff limestone fireplace surround, underscored by 7 inch white oak planked flooring that has a slight beveled edge and a wire brush finish. **BELOW:** Lower level bar and wine room. The 12 foot ceilings show off the beautiful crown moldings and beams, all designed to tie into the curved cabinetry. **ABOVE:** The master bathroom contains honed Dynasty Pearl white marble floors and floor to ceiling wainscot panels that surround the free standing tub's intimate space

but then again, Malapanes, builder of more than 80 homes scattered throughout Winnetka, Glencoe, Wilmette, Northfield, and Lake Forest—as well as other Chicago suburbs, likes it that way.

“I’m all about the character and detail,” he says. “I don’t just take any house project that comes my way. I like high-end design with a high level of finish, homes with detail, charm, and old-world styling.”

This North Shore manse has all of that. And, as he’s done since founding his general contractor business in 1995, Malapanes built it with a “give-each-house-its-due” credo.

“I always commit to doing only a few houses at a time so that I can constantly be on site, running the job and dealing with the owners directly,” he explains. “This way, because I’m not spread too thin, my clients get my full attention and a better product in the end.”

It’s a mantra he’s stuck with from the beginning, coming up to general contractor status the hard-scrabble way, taking every odd job he could as a youngster to prove himself to his dad, co-owner of Des Plaines-based Hercules Construction.

“I was always ambitious,” he says. “From the time I was little, I’d do whatever I could around a construction site, sweeping floors, cleaning up, and when I got older, doing demolition.”

His father taught him the basics, how to use a level, square, table saw, router, and other power tools, and by the time he was 8, Malapanes could be found in the family’s garage workshop, using those tools to build toy cars out of scrap plywood.

Indoors, you might find him poring over the thick, MAP books his realtor mom brought home, full of property listings.





ABOVE:The kitchen island made of Bianco Oro Terrastone Quartz spans 17 feet in length and features a mitered waterfall edge with veining that carries over each side. Behind the island is a 5 foot wolf dual fuel range with a handcrafted zinc hood that is wrapped with stainless steel banding and rivets. **RIGHT:** The home theater features a 2-1/4 inch thick floating marble countertop with a waterfall edge that seats four. Two lower levels have comfortable seating all with a view of the massive diagonal 161 foot screen. Fabric inlay panels flank wall pilasters that tie in beautifully with the beams above. A Lutron lighting control system allows you to set the proper ambiance, and the theatre's Dolby Atmos format with a Sony projection system feels like a commercial theater.

“I would scour through them, looking at the houses and lots that were available. I just loved it. Even as a teen, I was already planning to build my own house someday.”

Those plans, along with a gift for organization, had Malapanes saving every penny from early jobs selling pizza, working at gas stations, and doing odd jobs for his dad’s construction company. He continued to learn all he could about construction, building out basements, building decks. And by the time he was 22, working early hours at O’Hare airport as a fleet service clerk, Malapanes started bringing his construction tool belts along in his car.

“When I finished my shift, I’d drive around in neighborhoods looking for building sites where a house was being framed up. I’d go on to the site and ask, “Can I work here? Let me work, and pay me what you think I’m worth.”

Such moxie paid off. At 24, Malapanes took \$27,000 he’d saved and bought one of the lots he found in his mom’s realty-listing books. With his father’s help, he built his first house.

After that, Malapanes attendance at a custom home-builder’s symposium landed him his first client, a young couple who wanted him to build their new home. And then a bit of luck shone down: Because the property on which he built the couple’s two-story Prairie-style home involved a tear-down, a photo of Malapanes next to the finished house was featured in an article about tear-downs in the *Daily Herald* newspaper’s business section.

“Bob and Marcie Paddock, publisher of the *Daily Herald*, saw the photo of me with that house, and hired me to build their new home in Arlington Heights,” says Malapanes.

From then on, word of Malapanes and the quality of his con-



struction work, spread. He has never had a lull since, working with a carefully cultivated group of skilled subcontractors, and bidding jobs for well-renowned architects, and attracting clients throughout the North Shore.

Looking ahead, Malapanes says he will continue his quest to build beautiful custom homes one at a time.

“General contractors are a dying breed—I’m a dying breed. But I love what I do and want to keep doing it,” he says.

To pay that forward, Malapanes says he hopes to mentor other young builders who have the same passion he has. “When you sit down with clients who are full of the vision for the custom home they want you to build, and you know you can personally help them bring that into being, well, that’s a great thing to be a part of.”

For more information, visit homesbyjamesinc.com.