

# Builder/Architect

Chicagoland Edition

Our  
58<sup>th</sup>  
Year

Bruce A. Fogelson

**Paramount Homes**  
**Turning Buyers into Neighbors**



# Paramount Homes

## Turning Buyers into Neighbors

By Peter Olesker

**B**ruce Fogelson is not your average builder. In fact, find yourself engaged in conversation with Fogelson, founder and president of Paramount Homes, and you're more apt to think you're talking with a Chicago teacher, philosopher, architect, or even an artist. His agenda is different, his style is unorthodox, his point of view refreshing. To Fogelson, home building is not a job. It's a craft, or even a bundle of crafts, each one for which he has a great deal of respect.

Oh sure, Fogelson can talk sticks and bricks with the best of 'em. After all, real estate is in his blood. He is a third-generation builder, whose father, Jerry, is one of the biggest land developers in Chicagoland, responsible for thousands of acres of development in Lake County, Illinois, Northern Indiana, as well as the largest residential development in Chicago to date, Central Station. However, unlike many builders, Fogelson has not

worked for his father, but has worked for Chicago's largest City builder, MCL. Unlike many, he never tapped into the suburban pop-up towns and cookie-cutter product. And clearly, he has developed his own City/Chicago "style."

"In Chicago, one could say that each block is like a mile, and each neighborhood is like a little town," says Fogelson, who builds exclusively in the City. "Paramount Homes is a neighborhood company, and I am a neighborhood developer."

This statement is perhaps the essential to Fogelson's philosophy on home building. He is a neighborhood developer, developing not just homes, but the neighborhoods around them. Not an easy thing to do in Chicago, where the social, economic and political climate is engraved, and far different than in most hamlets or burbs. To build on "in-fill" sites in Chicago requires

Paramount offers value-added services that set them apart from other builders. Included with the purchase of every home is the services of Paramount and an interior designer. This custom kitchen is designed to satisfy even a master chef. Photo © 1996 by Jeff Guerrant Photography.



Home" for two homes in Bucktown which were side by side, and its courtyard row homes in Wrigleyville/Lakeview.

Fogelson is an active board member of the Home Builders Association of Greater Chicago. He has embraced the Chicago Division of the association in a big way, as a member of the Governmental Affairs Committee and featured builder in the City Parade of Homes, an annual event that showcases new homes throughout Chicago.

Because Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, and each neighborhood is unique, Fogelson has faced a new challenge with every home or development he has built. In Oakenwald, on Chicago's south side, Fogelson was faced with revitalizing a neighborhood that was once home to some of Chicago's most distinguished Greystones. In Lakeview and Wrigleyville on the near north side, Fogelson confronted the challenge of integrating new development

This kitchen design serves not only the primary purpose of the family meal, but also accommodates the center of entertainment. Working areas are placed away from through traffic. Modern City homes merge family, kitchen and dining rooms. Photo © 1996 by Jeff Guernant Photography.



In this master bedroom, Fogelson positioned the soaking tub so that it would also open to both the bedroom and master bath. The glass block separates the shower room, and the see-through fireplace separates the master bedroom.

into one of Chicago's popular but crowded areas. And in Bucktown and Wicker Park, Fogelson grappled with maintaining the cultural and architectural harmony that exists in two of Chicago's most diverse and gentrifying communities.

In each instance, he came up with solutions that were as unique as the neighborhoods themselves.

"With in-fill housing, you have to realize that the whole—the neighborhood—is greater than the sum of its parts—the homes, the institutions, like schools and businesses, and the people. You have to attend to the whole, considering quality construction, value in the marketplace, and integration of the project into the context of the neighborhood. This is an addition to service, quality and value to the product for prospective buyers."

Along those lines, Fogelson always presents his plans to neighborhood groups for approval, whether he's required to or not. And he frequently sponsors activities with different organizations and institutions intent on improving the community. For example, in 1993, when



Fogelson was developing Homes on Bell in Wicker Park, he sponsored a painting project at a local grammar school, and block parties. Ultimately, he wants to fit between the old and the new, or to use his words: "turn buyers into neighbors."

If these are the things a neighborhood expects from a builder, Paramount is equally cognizant of what a buyer expects.

"I want everyone to know as much (or a little bit more) about my business as they want to know," says Fogelson. "When they ask questions, I give detailed

Well-designed, well-constructed, and working with the neighborhood, Paramount Homes have won the Chicago Association of Realtors Good Neighbor Award five times in the last three years. Pictured here, Fogelson in front of "Best New Multi-Family" 1995. Photo © 1996 by Jeff Guernant Photography.



answers. We work through design, fit and finish challenges together. Only the buyer can truly know what they want in a home, and I prompt them to communicate that."

Paramount is a "semi-custom" builder with an ever-changing product line of single-family homes, townhomes, condos and apartments. According to Fogelson, it's not necessarily that complicated or expensive to deliver the custom portion of the home. For the standard components, they know their costs and maintain high standards. For items they're not familiar

with, they have set standard margins and can bid out subcontractor work.

Paramount includes interior design services with the purchase of every home, and will either bring in one of their own designers, or pay the consultation fee for a designer of the buyer's choice. Fogelson feels that consulting with a professional designer prior to construction helps the buyer establish a set of criteria for the interior of their home. From Paramount's point of view, it facilitates construction by providing both a firm point of departure from the everyday finishes and a tangible vision of the finished product.

Fogelson does not discourage his buyers from shopping around. "I have always told buyers that if they can show me a builder with a better spec for a similar product, I'll match it. Similarly, if they come to me with the same spec being offered at a lower price, I will try to match it. I want to meet or beat the

market competition on both quality and price."

A better product at a lower price: that would be enough to satisfy most builders. But the depth and breadth of value-added services Paramount offers truly sets them apart from the competition.

Paramount also publishes an annual newsletter which they distribute to each of their buyers. In the newsletter, they address any number of issues pertinent to owning a home in Chicago, from maintenance, real estate taxes and codes to the homeowner's relationship with their lender. Last year, in addition to making residents aware of the new law requiring carbon monoxide detectors, Paramount actually went out, bought the devices, and delivered them to all of their previously sold homeowners. As a standard after-market consideration, they always assist buyers in the protest of real estate taxes, providing them with the proper forms, as well as the supporting information needed to assure fair and reasonable property tax assessment.

Also, Paramount chooses to offer certain services after the closing that other builders would normally take care of beforehand. "We usually insist that paint touch-ups and small cosmetic corrections wait until after the closing," says Fogelson. "We want to be remembered by the buyer as the one who fixed the last detail. I don't care if your mover marks the walls. When you're finally settled in, and you're sitting in your comfortable chair, and you see a ding in the dry-wall, we want to be the ones who take care of it for you."

Paramount's commitment to its buyers is unparalleled. Fogelson explains, "I was schooled to believe that the market had segments. Old people, young people, first-time buyers, move-ups, etc. Well, in the City, we don't have such neat segments. We have people. And no two are alike. Everyone either is or has character in Chicago," says Fogelson, who lives in the City with his family, and sends his children to local schools.

"We find every type of buyer. They have different needs and preferences, but everyone gets the same quality/determined service, at the same rate, with the same commitment, which is the best we can offer."

Fogelson is very optimistic about the downtown home building market.

In particular, he sees builders crossing community boundaries and demising lines they once shied away from,

both in terms of geography and design. "I want to be out there pushing the industry," he says. "Not getting pulled along by it."

In some areas, like Oakenwald, Fogelson and other builders have spurred new development; while in other areas like Bucktown and Lakeview, Paramount is continually coming up with creative solutions to improve the quality of life within a neighborhood and its homes.

Still, as much as Fogelson plays a role in changing the face of residential real estate in Chicago, he remains very humble about his place in the overall scheme of things. "The best thing you can do in the real estate business is stick with it, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Remember that the best lessons you learn are from mistakes, and the best lesson, of those, is that you can and must fix 'em. Honor your commitments, and then give the extra measure of yourself to your craft."

*For more information, contact Paramount Homes at (312) 528-9077.*

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Paramount combines design, both vertical and living, in this City condo with 22-foot ceilings and dramatic loft above. Photo © 1996 by Jeff Guernant Photography.

