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Fechtel flourishes in high-end

■ **LUXURY HOME BUILDING:**
Redevelopment leads to niche

BY **KEN SALGAT**
STAFF WRITER

TAMPA — When it comes to high-end homes in the Tampa Bay area market, the Fechtel Co. in Tampa operates in some pretty thin air.

It builds luxury homes that have the average selling price of approximately \$1.5 million and has carved its niche in a sector where success often is defined by the number of closings per year.

Fechtel started carving the niche 10 years ago and never strayed from that business plan.

The company — an architecture and design-build firm founded in 1987 by Jay Fechtel — finds demand is constant but maintains low closing numbers. Fechtel said he turns negatives into positives — reduced quantity with increased quality.

“The number of closings in a year is often a reliable indicator as to the company’s success,” said Carol Jenkins, director of communication for Nohl Crest Homes Inc., a luxury home builder in Oldsmar. In 1999, Nohl

See **FECHTEL**, page 17



MARILEEN CABLE

Jay Fechtel, president of the Fechtel Co., concentrates on minimal closings with maximum prices such as this home in Turnbury Wood.

FECHTEL: *Fourth-generation builder sells architectural detail, gets base in niche market*

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Crest recorded 120 closings.

The same year, Fechtel recorded eight.

"Our clients look for design and quality," said Fechtel, from 1998 through 2000, president of the National Association of Homebuilders' Builder 20 luxury home group. The organization of 20 high-end custom home builders operates throughout the United States.

"Most always that's what the clients are looking for," Fechtel said. "God is in the details. We are trying to grow the houses in quality rather than to try to make the quantity larger. You cannot afford to spread yourself too thin."

THE FECHTEL CO.

PRESIDENT: Jay Fechtel

YEAR FOUNDED: 1987

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 14

HOMES PER YEAR: seven to nine

AVERAGE PRICE: \$1.5 million

PHONE NUMBER: (813) 264-7778

The company started with the simple premise of building a client base with individuals interested in finely crafted homes.

"To be successful in this market, you must have a client base," said Fechtel. "My first involvement came while I worked for my mother's company. She was a contrac-

SEE PAGE 7: Census data, analysis of American housing

tor and developer in the area, much of which was historical restoration in places like Ybor City and in Hyde Park in the early days of redevelopment."

Architectural detail was a key.

Fechtel offers as base products touches often viewed as amenities. Among them are: winding, wrought-iron staircases; vaulted arches; raised ceilings; Roman-style columns; marble floors; stone fireplaces and hardwood highlights. All fit into the company's "average" design plan.

"What you need to remember is that real estate brokerage firms want to make sure their clients are happy and get what they want," said Fechtel.

The market has stayed so strong for the company that a half-year waiting list now exists for its work.

"We have a backlog," said Fechtel. "As people come to us, we basically fit them into a schedule. Right now, we're probably five to six months away from the next start."

So, if the business is so profitable, why isn't everyone doing it?

"It is an extremely difficult process to build these homes," said Fechtel. "It takes a high level of detail and is time-consuming and takes a lot of one-on-one contact. It takes more of an artisan than a producer.



KATHLEEN GABRIEL

This 3-year old home built by the Fechtel Co. is representative of its high-end work in residential building.

It is very difficult to do. I like designing and crafting artwork, functional art, more than volume. Many people might be less motivated in that facet and might be better in the management, high number side."

A fourth generation builder, the company builds seven to nine homes per year on average, primarily in the 4,000- to 10,000-square-foot range.

Fechtel's main focus is designing and building custom homes, but it also does development work, having recently designed and developed two high-end communities: Turnbury Wood at Tampa Palms and StillWater in the Odessa area.

Turnbury is on 50 acres with five lots. StillWater is 114 acres with 48 lots. The lots are large, and the setting is pastoral.

"There are a couple properties we're

looking at right now in the Tampa Bay area," he said. "Probably more in the north part of Hillsborough County because of the lack of available property to the south and in Pinellas County.

"It's not really a change (the communities) but rather an extension of our service. We're learning that some property owners might want to develop neighborhood designs and that's something that we're very interested in doing. The house is one part of a desired lifestyle, but community is another aspect."

Fechtel maintains that demand far outweighs supply. "The demand continues to be there for us," he said.

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