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Our Exclusive Look At Million-Dollar
Homes And Million-Dollar Builders... 17

Private Residence, Sugar Land, Texas, page 46

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Having It All Under One Roof

*A 25,300-square-foot
Houston mansion provides every amenity,
including a gymnasium.*

The 3½-acre site overlooking the River Oaks Country Club is on the premier residential street in Houston. Most of the surrounding traditional homes were built in the 1920s, so the classically styled house relates well to its neighbors.



Of the custom homes he has built in the past 10 years, Christopher Sims is particularly proud of the elegant mansion he completed last year in Houston's prestigious River Oaks area. The house received the 1998 Prism Award from the Greater Houston Builders Association for the Custom Home Of The Year over \$750,000. Sims received the same award in 1997 for another home.

The owner, a Houston businessman, is an avid basketball enthusiast who wanted his own gymnasium. A 5200-square-foot gym attached to a house could be a real eyesore. However, this one is hardly noticeable because of the main house's large scale and architectural designer Robert Dame's plan and elevations.

The owner requested an H-shaped plan with a large formal living room and dining room in one continuous space. "Except for the number and type of rooms the couple wanted, they left most of the details up to me and wanted very few changes in my original concept," Dame says.

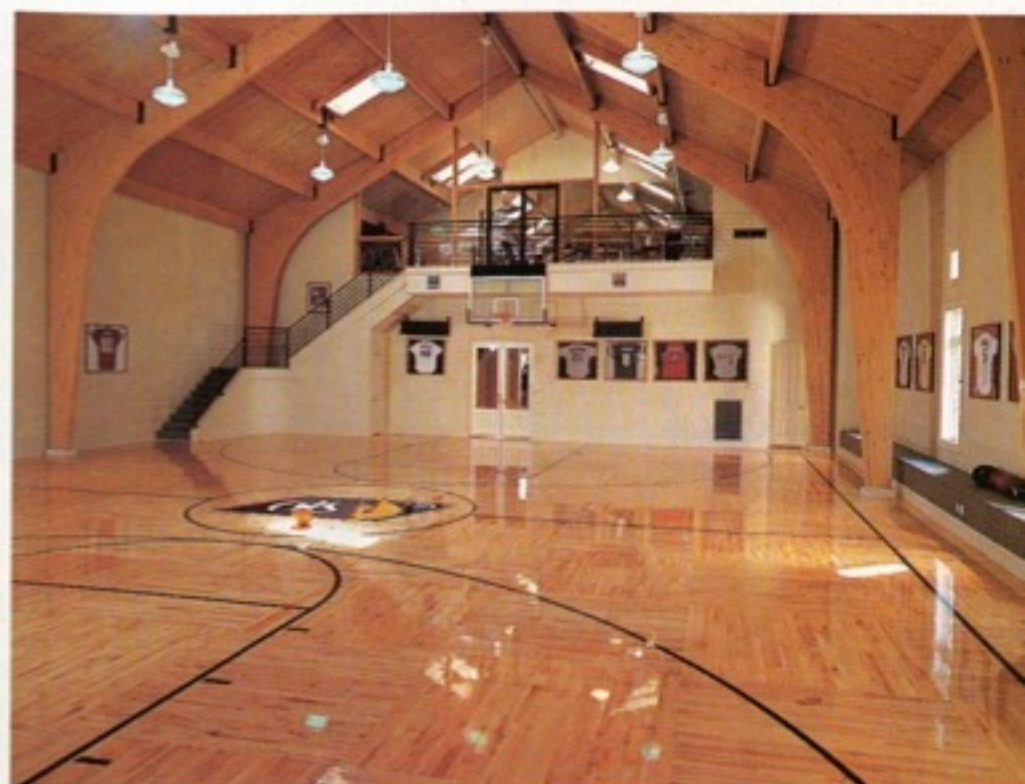
Despite the need to include a five-car garage and gymnasium, the house appears well balanced. The garage is contained in an L-shaped wing with its doors opening to an interior motor court reached through a porte cochere on one end of the house. The gym, which contains a large, cantilevered exercise loft, is behind the motor court and garage.

Framed by columns and an arch, the graceful staircase at one end of the entrance hall is the focal point of the foyer. The custom railings are wrought iron and brass. The stairs' design was inspired by a grand staircase in a mansion in Newport, R.I.

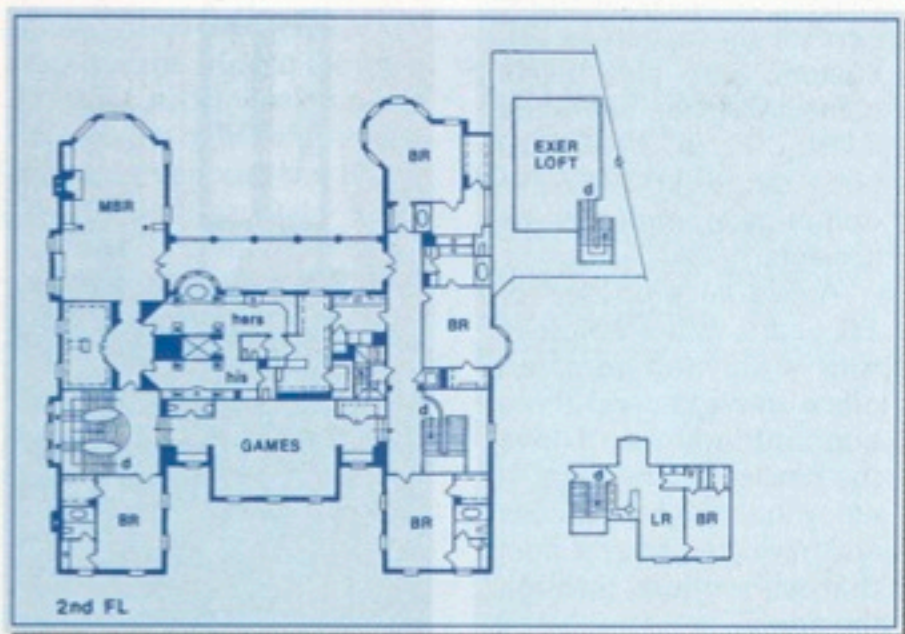
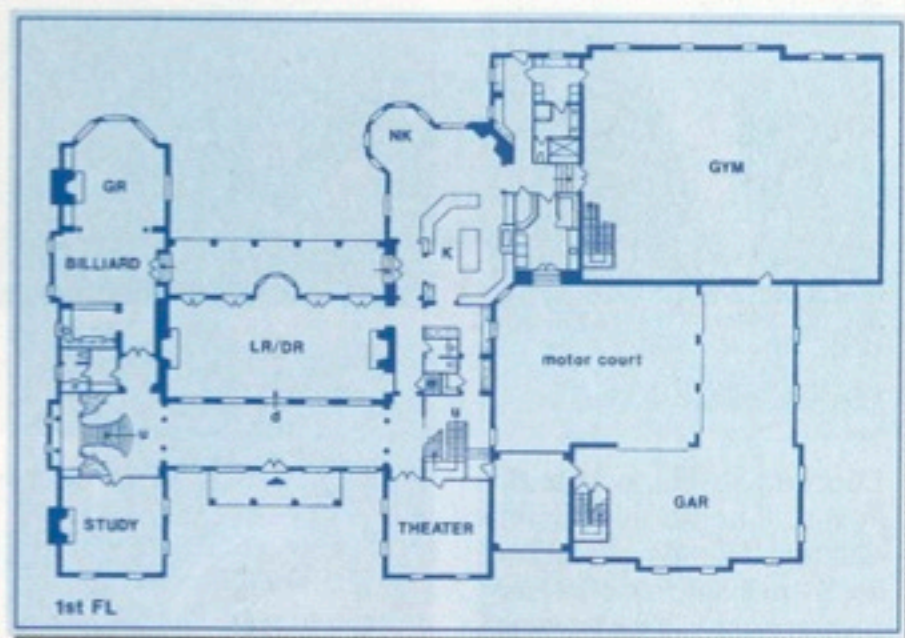




In addition to the pool and hot tub, the outdoor living area on the home's rear includes a summer kitchen and nearby tennis courts. Extensive outdoor lighting illuminates the wooded ravine as well as the pool area.



This fully equipped, 5200-square-foot gymnasium includes an exercise room that overlooks a basketball court.



Near the billiards room is a wet bar and small kitchen (right). A door in the billiard room leads to the covered rear terrace.

Several steps down from the entry hall, the formal living/dining room (bottom) features carved limestone fireplaces at either end and arched openings that bring in daylight.



Located in Sugar Land, Texas, Christopher Sims Custom Homes averages six \$1 million-dollar homes a year, working exclusively with architectural designer Robert Dame. Ninety percent of these homes are custom. Sims also builds some smaller homes in the \$700,000 to \$900,000 price range. In 1997, his company completed 11 projects.

Active as a builder for 10 years, Sims employs four staff members: an office manager and three superintendents. "I love the challenge," he says. "I enjoy the creative process and having an end product that will endure through the ages." □





Dame oriented many of the major rooms to the beautiful backyard. Beyond the pool and spa, the property slopes down to a wooded ravine featuring a man-made brook and grotto. "I try to create good balance, good vistas and sight lines within classical architecture," he says.

The designer and builder went first-class on details and materials. Beneath a slate roof, the exterior is finished with hand-molded brick accented with limestone columns, balustrades, cornice window trim and other ornamentation. Interior finishes include patterned marble and French limestone flooring, paneled mahogany walls in several rooms, deep cornices and moldings. "Many of the moldings were custom milled for this project," Sims says. "Our greatest challenge was completing the project in 14 months, considering its size and the amount of detail."

Beneath a covered porch with columns, the arched main gallery is flanked by fixed mahogany doors with fanlights. These arches introduce a pattern of aligned arches through the center of the house. Topped by a barrel vault, the

entry hall is a long gallery across the house, with a magnificent staircase at one end. From the hall, archways open into the 50-foot-long living/dining room, where rear doors and transoms overlook the covered terrace, pool and rear yard.

A mahogany-paneled library, a billiard room and a family room occupy the wing to the left of the entry. Off the billiard room is a combination bar and small kitchen. In the right wing, a state-of-the-art home theater is opposite the library. Beyond the service entry and rear stairs lie the kitchen, butler's pantry and a complex of spaces serving the gym and pool area. These include a locker room, wet sauna, dry sauna and juice bar.

The master suite occupies almost half the second floor. Introduced by a vestibule with a domed ceiling, the suite includes a living room, his-and-her baths and enormous walk-in closets with abundant built-in storage components.

—A.P.

MAJOR PRODUCTS USED: APPLIANCES: Sub-Zero, Viking. CABINETRY: Wood-Mode. HOME CONTROLS/AUTOMATION: Lutron. HVAC: Trane. WINDOWS: Norco.

Pecky cypress beams, textured walls and honey-toned cabinetry give the spacious kitchen a warm, country look. An octagonal bay behind the snack bar contains the breakfast area, which has an adjacent fireplace. The flooring is French limestone. The butler's pantry is seen through the arched doorway in the background.