





MIDDLEFORK DEVELOPMENT LLC



# FILLING THE VOID OF HIGH-END HOMES

**MIDDLEFORK DEVELOPMENT LLC TOOK ADVANTAGE**  
OF A LACK OF LUXURY INVENTORY IN CHICAGO WHEN THE  
GREAT RECESSION TOOK HOLD OF THE ECONOMY.

*by brian salgado*

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**AS COUNTLESS LUXURY** homebuilders went belly up in the last decade, it left a void for homebuyers with the cash to spend on these types of residences. Andrew C. Bowyer saw the opportunity this situation created, so he launched Middlefork in 2008 to cater to the demands of the most discriminating buyers in Chicago's luxury home market.

"In 2008, when the housing market fell, I had been performing a lot of analytics and realized there was still a demand for luxury housing," Bowyer says. "A number of developers that had been building these homes had left the industry. Middlefork started as a result of the recession, the demand and little supply."

Bowyer has relied on his business acumen and strong sense of design to make Middlefork a luxury custom homebuilding firm unlike any other in the Chicago area. He studied architecture at the University of Cincinnati where, through its co-op program, he realized he preferred the business side of the construction industry.

So, Bowyer earned degrees in finance and marketing.

Combining these business disciplines with his background in architecture, he pursued a career in the design industry and, subsequently, in the consulting industry where he spent 15 years as a professional services consultant.

When the U.S. economy collapsed, however, Bowyer saw an opportunity to combine all his interests and experience in the

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ANDREW C. BOWYER, PRESIDENT

development industry. He was eager to fill the void left behind when other luxury custom homebuilders departed the business. It certainly helped that Bowyer had the business intelligence and aesthetic expertise to make his dream a reality.

"Middlefork was formed out of my desire to combine my business and design interests into a single-focused career," Bowyer says.

### Unique for Every Customer

The business side of Bowyer's active mind has him constantly performing market re-

search to determine what the luxury buyers in the Chicago area will want in their next home.

He conducts this research through his repeat clients as well as surveys directed toward high-net-worth buyers.

"I'm trying to create homes I think are responsible to the specific needs and wants of my market, rather than thinking I know what those things are," Bowyer says. "To date, I have never repeated a floor plan or elevation, and every home has been designed to be responsive to the context of the site and the neighborhood in which it has been built."

Technological capabilities is one element constantly in demand from homebuyers today, according to Bowyer. He says Middlefork adds the infrastructure to support app-based technologies to its home designs, which help homeowners remotely control lighting, music or security, as well as many other requirements.

"We're making sure this is considered in the design, whether for a custom owner or for a home where the owner has yet to be identified," Bowyer says. "We make sure our homes have the flexibility to incorporate whatever solutions they may want upon move-in...as well as down the road."

Energy efficiency also ranks high on the list of demands for Middlefork's homebuyers. Since Chicago-area lots are typically a mere 25-by-125 feet, Bowyer's options for energy-efficient systems are somewhat limited.



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While geo-thermal or solar heating may not be as cost-effective in such tight, urban setting.

Bowyer says Middlefork relies on the best-available insulation, highest-rated appliances and windows, and paint without volatile organic compounds to achieve these milestones.

"We know clients are moving in the 'green' direction and have concerns with material choices, so it has become a default for us to be conscientious of these selections as well," Bowyer says.

For interior design, Middlefork's clients are asking for a more transitional look, adding clean lines to open concepts. On the exterior, however, Bowyer says customer's still appreciate a classic, more traditional style.

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home should look versus how it should live. They want a more carefree, open lifestyle within a more traditional wrapper," Bowyer says. "And our clients are looking for luxury throughout the home. They want high-end finishes everywhere; not only with their plumbing and lighting fixtures, but now in hardware as well."

"Doorknobs, for instance, used to be a nonfactor, but now a lot more emphasis is fo-

cused on them – and cabinet hardware – as they provide another opportunity for touch and feel," he adds.

No matter the demands of custom home clients, Middlefork has made its reputation on delivering exactly what customers want in their homes.

"We're best known for our attention to detail, both in the built product as well as in how we manage clients," Bowyer says. "When working with custom clients, they appreciate how attentive we are to their ideas, regardless of where we are at in the construction process. We pay attention and help evaluate the impact of their ideas and, if requested, move forward with them."

### **Hands-on Growth**

Although Middlefork expects to continue to grow, Bowyer says he wants to maintain a manageable size for his company.



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"I hope to continue to grow, but we won't grow to a point where I'm not involved with every project," Bowyer says. "I'm developing a staff that's very talented and has the same kind of approach and appreciation for architecture that I have, but I cannot imagine a day where I do not have meaningful involvement in every project."

With a strong sense of design and business acumen, Andrew C. Bowyer works to be part of each project Middlefork takes on. Though he's working to build a talented staff with a similar appreciation for architecture and design, Bowyer says his hands-on approach will not change.

Bowyer also hopes to guide his company toward becoming a completely custom homebuilder for the Chicago residential market.

"We hope to be doing more and more homes where the client is identified at the beginning of the process."

"Identifying their goals and establishing their design program at the onset of the project enables us to have a roadmap as to where we are headed," he adds. "It also gives us objectives against which we can evaluate our performance. Nothing feels

better than to know you are helping to make someone's dreams come true; that you are helping to create the ideal space in which someone will raise their family and create a lifetime of memories. It feels even better to know that you met your client's goals in a timely manner – and on budget."

"Custom home projects bring their own set of challenges, but they also bring their own set of rewards," he continues. "Regardless of the client, though, I ultimately, just hope to have the opportunity to continue doing what I love and enjoy doing." **M**



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