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LUXURY LIVING

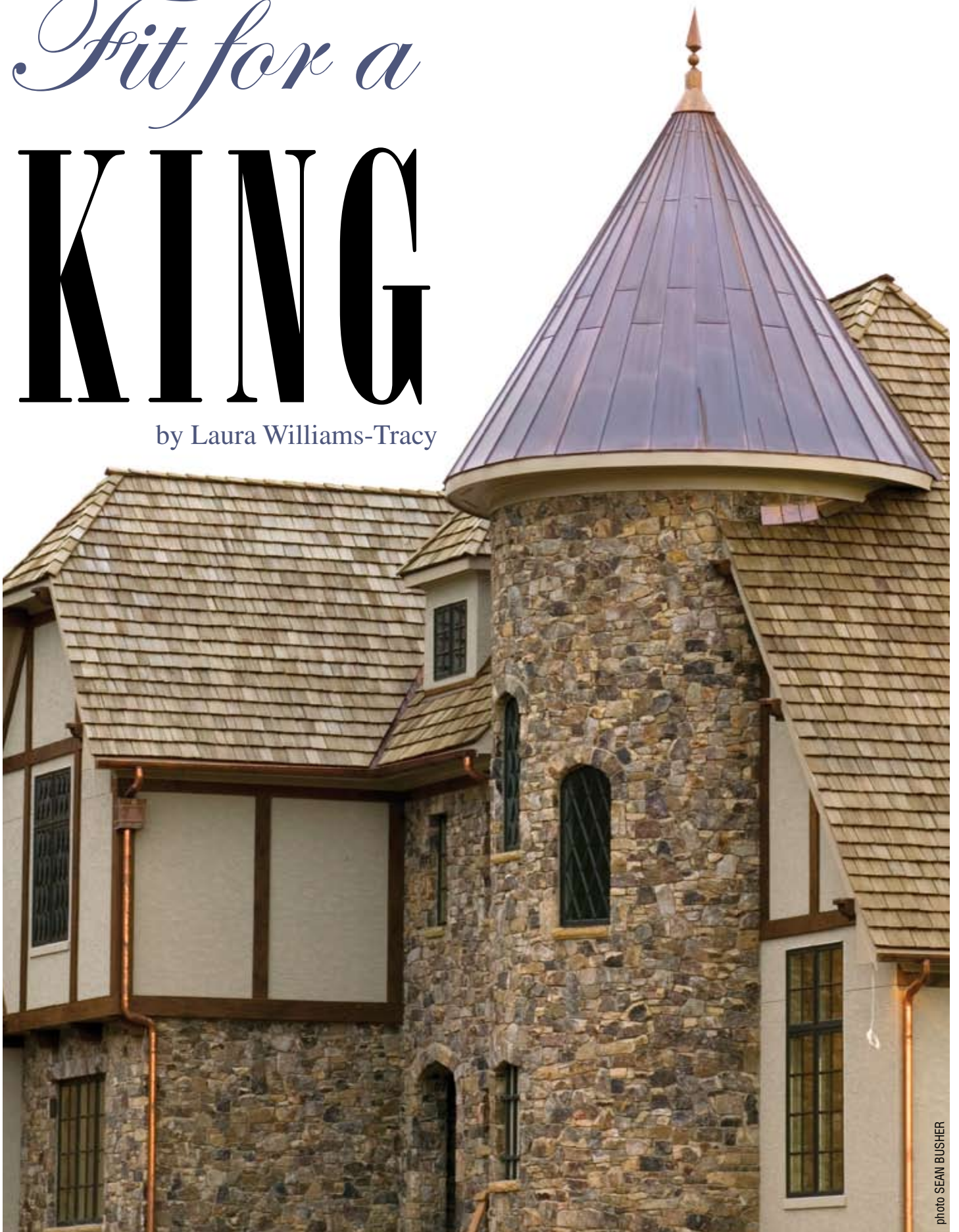
*Authentic
touch*



Peter Leeke relies
on English roots to
build Old World homes

Fit for a
KING

by Laura Williams-Tracy





Kingswood Custom Homes is active at The Club at Longview in Union County, where it built this 6,900-square-foot Gothic mansion overlooking the Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. The house at left is under construction and also reflects the builder's expertise in Old World homes.

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When Suzanne and Richard Gordon were ready to move from Statesville and build on a lot at Lake Norman, Suzanne knew she wanted an Old World home.

The attraction was not so much the soaring ceilings and extensive detailing or the current rage for European styles in the custom market. She simply wanted true English charm.

The key was to find the right builder that could deliver an authentic product.

Other builders said they could do that look, but why would I want anyone other than someone who grew up with that type of house? asks Gordon, who picked Peter Leeke of Kingswood Custom Homes to build her 5,000-square-foot golf-course home at The Point.

It wasn't just Kingswood's recent HomeArama show house in Charlotte's Stonecroft that drew in Gordon, though she admits she loved everything about it. She felt Leeke's British citizenship give his

designs an authenticity sometimes lacking in other builders' Old World homes.

After developing a successful home-building career in his native London, Leeke moved his business and his European sensibilities to Charlotte a decade ago. Since his arrival, Kingswood Custom Homes, which is named for an English

English builder brings authenticity to Old World homes

village where Leeke once lived, has built 260 luxury homes in the Charlotte market in such developments as The Club at Longview, The Sanctuary, The Point and The Peninsula.

Every Kingswood home has something in common with English buildings Leeke knows well. Like the adornment of an early 17th-century Saxon Church where

Leeke and his wife, Louise, were married, he installs a hand-cast date stone in a wall of each home.

Like many who find their way into the profession, Leeke as a child in London was always drawing, either designing a treehouse for the backyard or some other structure.

"I was always very arty — math and art," he recalls.

Leeke earned a degree in architecture from London Polytechnic University. But it was more than schooling that fueled his love for buildings. He credits that interest to his grandmother, who owned a number of successful hotels and always kept him interested in their sale and renovation.

"There's the smells on the job site — diesel fuel and dirt being turned over. It's in your blood or it's not."

After school, Leeke moved stateside in 1980 and worked for two cousins who owned a home-building company in Florida. But when the first Gulf War and



Kingswood's March of Dimes' home at The Point was built on spec but found eager buyers in Anne and Lowry Hobbs. He's had long experience in millwork manufacturing and found the details in the home's kitchen (left) and living room satisfied the couples' high standards

recession soured the market in the early 1990s, Leeke returned to England and launched a home-building business. There he built high-end custom homes as well as housing commissioned by the British government.

"But once you've lived in the United States it's hard to go back," says Leeke.

He visited Charlotte during a vacation and thought the area seemed right for more builders.

"At the same time, someone was wanting to buy my business back in England. It all came together very easily."

Leeke launched Kingswood a decade ago. His first homes were in Piper Glen and Berkley, but business took off when he began building at Crescent Resources communities at Lake Norman, The Point and The Peninsula. Kingswood homes received the "Best of the Lake Award" for curb appeal from the Lake Norman Homebuilders Association in 2004 and 2005.

In the late 1990s, Leeke returned to his roots with English-style homes featuring authentic brick and stone, Tudor elevations and chimney pots. His 2001 entry in HomeArama further solidified his company's presence in the luxury market.

Besides Longview and The Sanctuary, Kingswood is building in The Palisades, Fort Mill's Springfield, and Chamberly and Stonegate in the SouthPark area.

Leeke keeps his homes authentic by paying close attention to details, especially colors.

"A lot of the homes in England are 400 or 500 years old. The paint colors they used then were based on the materials they had to work with, so I try to stay close to what they look like," says Leeke.

English homes of four centuries ago had black beams on the exterior that were preserved with bitumen, a material akin to tar.

"As soon as you start putting grey on a home or red, it's not in keeping with the

traditional architecture," says Leeke.

Oozing mortar between bricks, sometimes used in Old World replicas, is never seen in England, he says. "Even 400 years ago you would not see it."

Leeke says buyers are attracted to Old World styles because they are cozier than other homes. But like all trends, it will eventually be displaced, and he expects the next hot designs will also come from Europe.

Builders there are already embracing more contemporary styles, and he expects



photos RICHARD RUDISILL



photo SEAN BUSHNER

Kingswood's homes in Longview feature design elements based on owner Peter Leeke's background in construction in England.

the busy lifestyles of Americans will soon create a demand for cleaner lines and less clutter.

“Old World design is a romance with the past. It’s nostalgia. But this trend can’t last forever.”

Though his roots are thoroughly English, Leeke does not limit his repertoire to Old World homes.

Homeowner Anne Hobbs says Leeke’s enthusiasm for design extends to many other styles.

She and husband Lowry Hobbs were planning to build a home at Lake Norman after moving to the area and purchasing WestPort Marina in Denver.

The Hobbs’ expectations would likely have proven difficult for just any builder to

meet. Lowry Hobbs had spent 20 years in millwork manufacturing, serving as chief executive and owner of companies that made columns, windows, doors and other products. The couple had come to prefer traditional architecture and only the finest millwork.

They were starting the process of planning their home in early 2005 when they went to see Kingswood Homes’ March of Dimes House at The Point. The house is a Nantucket style inspired by the 2003 film *Something’s Gotta Give* starring Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson.

“Lowry quickly reached the conclusion that we could not build a house that we would like more,” says Anne Hobbs.

Knowing the show house was soon to receive lots of publicity and likely a buyer, the couple made an offer the next morning.

Leeke’s experience and outlook on design apply to styles other than just Old World, Anne Hobbs says. The couple has lived in Italianate and Lowcountry homes.

“The thing about homes that are done authentically is the longer you are in them, the more you appreciate them,” says Hobbs. “Sometimes in my house I notice a corner where the millwork meets in a certain way, and I say, ‘Oh, that’s pretty.’” ❖



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