

Qualified  
**Remodeler**

MASTER  
**DESIGN**  
AWARDS 2020

# Remodeling Excellence

The 42nd annual  
Master Design Awards  
showcase creative solutions in the  
construction of extraordinary projects.

*by Kyle Clapham*

2020 Gold for Bathroom \$50,000-\$75,000  
Wolf Architects, Boston, Mass.

*Photo: Eric Roth*



**FOR** each of the past 42 years, *Qualified Remodeler* has received hundreds of entries to its Master Design Awards from companies across the U.S. This year, we once again accepted some of the best projects in the history of the program, thanks in part to our continued partnerships with the Chrysalis Awards and the NARI Contractor of the Year (CotY) Awards.

After collecting the submissions, we invited eight judges to review the entries and, ultimately, select the projects featured on the following pages and at [QualifiedRemodeler.com](https://QualifiedRemodeler.com).

We appreciate all submissions to the Master Design Awards and ask our judges to score every project and provide written feedback as well. We hope you enjoy seeing the winners and find inspiration in their exceptional designs.

# Proficient Perception

The judges of the 42nd annual Master Design Awards accepted a difficult task: Review and score hundreds of entries across 22 categories.

**THEY** completed the laborious assignment remotely, presenting gold, silver, bronze—and sometimes honorable mention—awards within each group (two categories have only gold winners). The judging board this year included:

**Lori Bryan**, vice president/COO, Marrokal Design & Remodeling, San Diego, California

**Dolores Davis**, president/general manager, CG&S Design-Build, Austin, Texas

**Abe Degnan**, president, Degnan Design-Build-Remodel, DeForest, Wisconsin

**Karen Feeney**, business development, Allen Construction, Santa Barbara, California

**Chaden Halfhill**, founder/CEO, Silent Rivers Design+Build, Clive, Iowa

**Alan Hanbury**, owner, House of Hanbury Builders, Newington, Connecticut

**Heather Heydet**, marketing director, Exovations, Cumming, Georgia

**Michael Menn**, principal architect, Michael Menn Ltd., Northbrook, Illinois

We caught up with the judges after they finished their scoring to ask them about what they saw during the design competition.

**What were the top trends in the winning designs?**

**Menn:** One of the trends in the winning designs was the bold use of color—sometimes as an accent and sometimes as the main theme.

**Degnan:** The top trends in the winning designs were designs that were contextually appropriate for the home. Some of them were stunning and over the top, while others of them were modest but were absolutely perfect for the home was that was being remodeled.

**Davis:** While there were some fabulous designs, it seemed to me that there is a trend towards a more, simple clean approach towards the design. The projects were not as elaborate, rather very clean and refined.

**Feeney:** Some of the top trends I noticed in the winning designs were open, light-filled spaces; thoughtful approaches to create efficiently



Lori Bryan, vice president/COO,  
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Chaden Halfhill, founder/CEO,  
Silent Rivers Design+Build

functioning spaces; really responding to the needs of the owners; and, the ability to address/fix long-term problems/challenges.

**Hanbury:** As expected, open concept was a core principal of most of the projects, with all-white kitchens countered by two color schemes and massive islands. Soaking tubs were less popular than huge, no-step showers, with built-in seats, multiple outlets and clear glass providing unobstructed views through the space, as well as glass for views of the outdoors.

**Bryan:** Details. Each of the winning projects showcased the details, whatever they were.

**Heydet:** Clean, neutral spaces with creative and thoughtful use of natural light prevailed in most winning interiors. Winning exteriors displayed large, relaxing outdoor living areas (porches, patios, decks, pools and hardscapes) and windows designed to maximize views and lighting.

**Halfhill:** White, blue and gray. But trendy aesthetics do not equate to smart design or great projects, as evidenced by some of the dissent among jurors.

**What constitutes a great winning presentation?**

**Menn:** A winning presentation can be compared to a book. There needs to be a beginning, a middle and an end. Some people (myself included) like to start with a money shot, followed by a comprehensive explanation (sometimes with only pictures) of what was there before, how they took it apart and what it looks like afterwards.

**Degnan:** Having before-and-after floor plans on the same page, next to each other, so that they can be compared. Same thing for before-and-after photos, having them next to each other for comparison. Finally, look at what the judging qualifications are: How are the judges going to be giving you points?

**Davis:** A great winning presentation has these four elements: before-and-after photos, floor plans, excellent photography, and it should tell a good story.

**Feeney:** What really made the difference was the quality of the presentation, including the ability to tell the story of the transformation during the remodel; having great before-and-after photos; and making a unique, interesting presentation.

**Hanbury:** Winning entries lead the judges through

their thought process and boldly present the changes that created their solution in a way that highlights what was changed.

**Bryan:** Great photography and great storytelling that was brief, yet complete and concise, were components of the winning presentations.

**Heydet:** The degree of difficulty in your project must sometimes be pointed out in a clear, short, bolded statement. Refrain from long paragraphs. Leave out the ho-hum points and be sure the big ones stand out. Use bullets and spacing so the eyes can see lots of information very quickly.

**Halfhill:** Great presentations are defined by amazing photos, strong, clear drawings, and simplified explanations. Great projects are defined by aesthetic resolutions and attentiveness to details being carried throughout.

#### What exactly did the non-winning entries lack?

**Menn:** What wasn't there were good and concise descriptions, as well as good photographs.

**Degnan:** The non-winning entries were lacking in their thoroughness primarily. Some of them lacked explanation, others lacked photos. Some lacked floor plans. Also, submissions that had inferior photography became harder to judge and, if they were not presented with thorough answers to the judging criteria, the photography quality may have prevented us from discerning the proper number of points that could have been earned.

**Davis:** The most important part of the non-winning entries was that the overall presentation lacked a sense of refinement, as did the actual project. The project might have been really amazing, but the lack of attention to detail in the presentation made it so-so.

**Hanbury:** The non-winners left out the before plans or pictures for areas that were representative of the entries' best work, making it hard to tell if there were indeed hurdles to produce the finished product. Often entrants did not provide all that was asked and showed pictures of areas that were not unique or impressive examples of their work.

**Bryan:** Some of the non-winning entries lacked nothing because there were so many entries. Entries with poor photography were eliminated right away.

**Heydet:** Before and after pictures that were hard to "read" because the angles were different, or the shot did not include what the other did. Clarity and brevity—too much text that did not move the story along.

#### What are the benefits for companies who submit?

**Menn:** Benefits are always in marketing who you are, what you do and the fact that you have just won a national award.

**Degnan:** The benefit for any company to submit



Karen Feeney, business development,  
Allen Construction



Alan Hanbury, owner,  
House of Hanbury Builders

## "EACH OF THE WINNING PROJECTS SHOWCASED THE DETAILS."

Lori Bryan



Heather Heydet,  
marketing director, Exovations



Michael Menn, principal  
architect, Michael Menn Ltd.

an award entry is first of all learning the process of submitting an award entry. Once you know how you have submitted your award, and you see the project that won in your category, you begin to get an understanding of how your project and your submission might have compared to the award-winning entry.

**Davis:** A benefit for companies that submit awards is that the feedback can be helpful to them to know how they are presenting themselves out in the world. Many presentations were just so top notch that you knew they were good companies and branded and marketed themselves well.

**Feeney:** A design award can be used as a great marketing tool—something you can showcase in your statement of qualifications for potential new clients, on your website and in press releases to local media. You also learn how to describe your projects in an engaging and thoughtful way.

**Hanbury:** Companies who plan ahead to enter into these types of contests, whether they win or not, have a library of easy to follow before-and-after projects that are incredibly valuable when trying to ferret out future clients' tastes and expectations.

**Heydet:** Even if your entry doesn't place, you now have a rich content—a story to tell and share about your work on your website, social media, newsletter, blog, sales presentations, etc.

**Halfhill:** Comparing personal work against the winners and ascertaining the variables in design-build and learning how to better execute work. Great opportunity to assess prior decisions and see how they compare.

#### What will you take back to your company?

**Menn:** I love judging these awards because I get to see great trends from all over the country and how other professionals solve problems and work with their clients. It's a win-win.

**Degnan:** Certainly, the benefit of being a judge is to learn about the presentation styles of other companies. But, also to gain insights to bring back to my own company. For example, blue is definitely in style, plus gold tones in plumbing and hardware.

**Davis:** I was impressed with many of the entries. I took a lot of notes on what I could do to improve our design award entries. I also learned there are some amazing companies doing awesome work.

**Feeney:** The next time our company submits a project, I am going to make sure the format for my presentation is unique: the story, the layout of information, the quality of the photos.

**Bryan:** There is so much talent out there. We need to be selective in our future entries and present the best story possible to support the photos.

**Heydet:** I will definitely create shorter text entries that only include the highlights and punctuate the level of difficulty in pulling off the final project. **QR**



## Exterior Facelift

### GOLD

**MANTIS DESIGN + BUILD**  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.  
mantisdesignbuild.com

**Designer:** Paul Linnebach  
**Project location:** Minneapolis, Minn.  
**Square footage:** 2,600  
**Project cost:** \$130,000

Eager to breathe new life into their 1924 Craftsman home, a family of five desired to update its exterior to modernize the look while preserving its original spirit. They sought to create the feel of a beautiful Zen sanctuary by incorporating stylistic elements that had inspired them in travels to Asia, and they wanted to include as many natural elements—wood, water, stone, light—as possible.

Expanding the portico created the aura of a temple entrance, something elegant and welcoming that makes people feel as if they are entering a sacred space. The timber frame uses graceful cuts of cedar wood, and the steps were formed from Indiana limestone and concrete stamped with a slate imprint. The perimeter of the roof is bordered by half-round copper gutters and downspouts.

### SILVER

**GALLAGHER CONSTRUCTION**  
Bellevue, Wash.  
gallagherconstructionllc.com

### BRONZE

**HOFFMAN WEBER CONSTRUCTION**  
New Brighton, Minn.  
hwconstruction.com