

# TexasArchitect

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## In Mississippi, Houston Design Firms Assist Post-Katrina Housing Recovery

**EAST BILOXI** Two years after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, the residents of this once-close-knit Mississippi community are still trying to recover from unprecedented devastation. In some areas of East Biloxi, nearly 80 percent of housing is estimated to have been lost or made uninhabitable from the hurricane.

Since Katrina, Architecture for Humanity an organization that promotes "architectural and design solutions to global, social and humanitarian crises" and local organizations, including the East Biloxi Coordination Relief and Redevelopment Agency, the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio of Mississippi State University and others, have been working to help families in Biloxi's first and second wards to repair and rebuild their homes and community.

Architecture for Humanity invited local and nationally recognized design firms to create viable, affordable, and sustainable proposals. Called the Biloxi Model Home Project, the program provides free design services for eligible families to build new homes. Of the 12 firms selected to participate, two were from Houston—MC2 Architects and Brett Zamore Design.

MC2 was recommended by Michael Grote, the program manager for the Biloxi Model Home Project. Grote, who graduated from the University of Houston with an architecture degree, was familiar with the design-build firm and believed that its principals' construction knowledge and cultural background would be an asset to the project. Grote's intuition was right. Vietnamese architect MC2's Chyung Q. B. Nguyen's ability to mediate the language and cultural differences of the large Vietnamese population living in East Biloxi has been significant. Zamore, with already established ties to Architecture for Humanity, also proved to be a natural fit.

The two Houston firms were among the designers who participated in a Design Fair held in East Biloxi on Aug. 19, 2006, where they meet with eligible families and make presentations. The event allowed families the opportunity to select a team of professional designers with whom they would like to work. Of the 12 firms selected for the program, six firms (with a total of seven design concepts) advanced past this initial stage. MC2's design was selected by two families – the Nguyens and the Trans – and Brett Zamore Design was selected by the Parker family.



MC2's design for the Nguyen residence (top) incorporates a mid-level porch to connect the family with the outdoors, particularly a large oak in the back yard. Brett Zamore Design altered its original concept for the Parker residence (bottom) by turning a courtyard stair to open toward the street.

The concepts presented at the Design Fair were, by necessity, only suggestive. While the schemes demonstrated adaptability, flexibility, and expandability, they were not designed for a specific site or to address a particular lifestyle. For example, the Trans are an older couple near retirement while the Nguyens are a young family with four children and the Parker family comprises a single mother with six children.

As a starting point, the designs had to be agile enough to accommodate a broad range of occupants. Furthermore, as part of a successful humanitarian outreach, they had to foster the traditional architectural character of the East Biloxi community. As a result, many of the residential designs gesture toward the ver-

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