

# Daniel Allen Designs

CUSTOM HOME PLAN DESIGN · ATLANTA & NATIONWIDE

A REFERENCE GUIDE · 9 PAGES

# The Custom Home Cost Guide.

*Metro Atlanta · 2026 Edition*

What design actually costs, what construction actually costs, and the math most firms will not show you.

PREPARED BY *Daniel Allen Sievers* · PRINCIPAL DESIGNER & FOUNDER

# From Daniel.

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The pricing of custom homes is unnecessarily opaque. Most homeowners I meet have been told a fee percentage but not what it covers, given a per-square-foot figure but not what's actually included at that number, and asked to commit to seven-figure decisions on the basis of a 20-minute conversation. That is not the way you make a sound investment, and it is not how my studio operates.

This guide exists because I have spent thirty years on both sides of the conversation — twenty of them as a custom home builder, the last decade-plus as a residential designer working alongside builders. The numbers in this document are the ones I would want to see if our positions were reversed. They reflect what we actually charge, what construction actually costs in Buckhead, Sandy Springs, Johns Creek, Alpharetta, Milton, and Roswell in 2026, and the math behind why thorough design documents pay for themselves several times over.

Use this however is useful to you. Bring it to any designer you interview, including us. The right firm should be able to talk through every figure here without flinching. If you decide you want a conversation about your specific project after reading it, I welcome the call — but the point of this document is to give you what you need before any sales conversation begins.

— *Daniel Allen Sievers*

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# What you'll actually pay a designer.

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Design fees for a luxury custom home in Metro Atlanta typically range from **2% to 10% of total construction cost**. The variation is not arbitrary. Four factors move a project up or down that range:

- **Home size.** A 4,500-square-foot home requires less documentation than a 12,000-square-foot estate. More square footage means more floor plan area, more elevations, more details, more coordination.
- **Design complexity.** A simple rectangular footprint with a single roof system costs less to document than a multi-wing plan with intersecting roofs, varying heights, and complex geometry.
- **Scope of services.** Full-service design from concept through construction documents costs more than picking up an existing concept and developing it to permit-ready drawings.
- **Site conditions.** Steep grades, complex setbacks, restrictive HOA requirements — all add to the design and documentation effort.

*Where most luxury custom homes fall: **between 3% and 6%** for the full design package, with simpler projects on the lower end and high-complexity estates above 6%.*

# The four phases inside the fee.

Every Daniel Allen Designs engagement runs through four phases. The fee covers all four — start to permit-ready set.

## Phase 1 · Discovery & Programming

Understanding your lifestyle, functional needs, site conditions, and project goals. Site analysis, programming discussions, preliminary design direction.

## Phase 2 · Schematic Design

Initial floor plan concepts, exterior design direction, spatial organization. You review and approve the overall approach before we invest in detailed documentation.

## Phase 3 · Design Development

Refining every design decision — materials, windows, doors, cabinetry style, fixture direction, structural approach. This is where the design becomes fully resolved.

## Phase 4 · Construction Documents

The complete drawing set: floor plans, elevations, sections, roof plans, door and window schedules, finish schedules, interior elevations, electrical plans, structural coordination, and specifications.

These are the documents your builder will use to price, permit, and construct your home. They are also the documents that determine whether the project stays on budget.

# What it actually costs to build, per SF, in 2026.

Construction costs in Metro Atlanta vary significantly based on location, finish level, and complexity. These are the ranges we see across our projects in Buckhead, Sandy Springs, Johns Creek, Alpharetta, Milton, and Roswell:

TIER	RANGE PER SF
Standard custom construction	\$250 – \$350
High-end luxury construction	\$350 – \$500
Ultra-luxury / estate construction	\$500 – \$600+

**What pushes a project up the tier:** custom millwork as a default rather than an upgrade, natural-stone and full-bed masonry exteriors, structural steel for long spans or cantilevers, integrated whole-home automation, custom-fabricated steel windows, slate or natural-tile roofing, structural pools and resort-level outdoor living.

**What land does to the number:** Lot acquisition is separate from the costs above. In Buckhead and Tuxedo Park, lot values frequently exceed the cost of the structure itself. Site preparation — clearing, grading, retaining walls, utilities — can add \$50K to \$300K+ depending on conditions.

WORKED EXAMPLE

# A 6,000 SF luxury custom home, end to end.

Here is the full math for a representative high-end luxury custom home in Metro Atlanta:

LINE ITEM	AMOUNT
Construction (6,000 SF × \$400/SF, high-end luxury)	\$2,400,000
Site preparation & utilities (typical)	\$80,000
Daniel Allen Designs fee (4% of construction)	\$96,000
Engineering consultants (structural, civil, MEP)	\$25,000 – \$50,000
<b>Total project (excluding land)</b>	<b>~\$2.6M</b>

**The design fee is 3.7% of total project cost.** The same home with incomplete construction documents typically incurs the following hidden costs:

HIDDEN COST	TYPICAL RANGE
Bid contingency padding (5–15% on ambiguous elements)	\$50,000 – \$150,000
Change orders during construction (industry avg \$47K/project)	\$30,000 – \$80,000
Schedule delays (2–4 months at carrying costs)	\$15,000 – \$60,000
<b>Total hidden cost from incomplete documents</b>	<b>\$95,000 – \$290,000</b>

*The design fee is the cheapest line on the project. A \$96,000 design fee that prevents \$95,000 to \$290,000 in downstream costs is not an expense — it is the highest-ROI decision you'll make on the entire build.*

# The conversation no one wants to have.

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There is a conversation that happens on nearly every custom home project in America, and it usually happens about four months after construction begins.

The homeowner calls their builder, frustrated. *"We just got a change order for \$38,000. I thought this was all figured out in the plans."*

The builder explains: *"The plans showed a vaulted ceiling in the great room, but there was no detail for how the HVAC gets from the mechanical room to the supply registers on the far wall. The soffit we have to build to run that ductwork was not in the drawings."*

Neither is wrong. The person who failed them both was the designer.

## Three ways incomplete documents inflate your budget:

- **During bidding, ambiguity becomes contingency.** When a builder cannot price a detail with precision — a wall section without insulation specs, a roof intersection without flashing details, a note that says "verify in field" — they add a 5–15% contingency. Multiplied across dozens of ambiguous details, the bid is inflated by tens of thousands of dollars before a single shovel breaks ground.
- **During construction, gaps become change orders.** Every detail unresolved during design must be resolved in the field — at field labor rates, with schedule pressure, without the collaborative review process design affords.
- **Over time, trust erodes.** Homeowners suspect their builder is taking advantage. Builders feel blamed for design shortcomings. The relationship — which should be collaborative — becomes adversarial. I watched this pattern destroy dozens of client-builder relationships during my two decades in construction. It is preventable.

*We are not selling drawings. We are selling the absence of problems.*

# The Builder's Eye, in seven dimensions.

Every design that leaves our studio is reviewed across seven critical dimensions. If a design does not pass each review, it does not leave our studio.

## 01 Structural Feasibility

Can this design be framed, supported, and constructed with standard methods? Are there hidden structural requirements that will add cost?

## 02 Material Availability

Are specified materials commercially available in the required sizes, finishes, and quantities? What are the lead times? Are there cost-effective alternatives?

## 03 Mechanical Coordination

Do HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems have adequate space — chases, soffits, ceiling cavities — to be installed without compromising the design?

## 04 Constructability

Can the design be built in a logical sequence? Are there elements requiring unusual methods, specialized labor, or precise timing that could cause delays?

## 05 Cost Transparency

Does the design give builders enough information to price accurately? Are there ambiguities that will lead to allowance padding or bid variability?

## 06 Code Compliance

Does the design comply with applicable building codes, zoning regulations, setback requirements, and HOA guidelines? Have we anticipated plan reviewer questions?

## 07 Detail Resolution

Are critical junctions, transitions, and intersections detailed clearly enough for a builder to execute without interpretation? Are waterproofing, flashing, and weather barrier details resolved?

*Every line serves a purpose. Every space tells a story.* — Daniel Allen Sievers

# Pre-call prep & how to reach us.

If you're planning a custom home — whether you have land under contract or are still in the early conceptual stages — there is no obligation in starting the conversation. Our initial consultation is complimentary and focused on one question: are we the right fit for your project?

## BEFORE WE TALK, THINK ABOUT

- **Your timeline.** When would you like to be in the home? Working backward from that date sets every other deadline.
- **Your site.** Have you closed on land? Are you considering more than one lot? Site conditions drive a meaningful fraction of design and construction cost.
- **Your scope.** Full-service design from concept through construction documents, or refining existing material into permit-ready drawings?
- **Your builder.** Have you selected one? If not, we can help you assemble a short list — and we often work alongside builders we have partnered with on previous projects.

## THREE WAYS TO REACH US

### PHONE

(770) 865-7953

### EMAIL

[dan@danielallendesigns.com](mailto:dan@danielallendesigns.com)

### ONLINE

[danielallendesigns.com/contact](https://danielallendesigns.com/contact)

*We don't take every project that comes through the door. The ones we do take, we take seriously.*

**Schedule a complimentary consultation** · [danielallendesigns.com/contact](https://danielallendesigns.com/contact)