

# MICHIGAN AVENUE

SPRING  
FASHION  
ISSUE

A photograph of Harrison Ford sitting in a dark brown leather chair. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue button-down shirt. He is holding a wooden baseball bat vertically in front of him with both hands. The bat has some text and a logo on it. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## HARRISON FORD

CHICAGO'S OWN DISCUSSES HIS POWERFUL NEW FILM, *42*  
& HIS WORK WITH CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

PLUS Victor Skrebneski, Laura Ricketts, Alber Elbaz

1705 North Dayton Street

Haute Property  
NEWS, STARS, AND TRENDS IN REAL ESTATE

# batting 1000

LUXURY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPER **ANDY BOWYER** HAS TURNED THE 2008 MARKET SHUTOUT INTO A WINNING STREAK FOR HIS STUNNING SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES. BY LISA SKOLNIK

What do luxury buyers want? According to Andy Bowyer, president of Middlefork Development group, they want “dramatic staircases, lots of light, four bedrooms on one floor, sumptuous master suites, great outdoor space, fantastic finishes, and professional-grade kitchen appliances. And quality construction with impeccable detailing.”

His latest home, a patrician, 5,800-square-foot Federal in Lincoln Park, has all that and more. Its elliptical grand staircase—which climbs four stories and is topped with a skylight that mimics its contours and floods the lower three floors with light—is worthy of a David Adler home. The dining room that edges it on the first floor actually soars two stories high. And the kitchen is stacked with all the right names: Wolf, Sub-Zero, Bosch, Fisher & Paykel, Franke, Perrin & Rowe, and more.

Altogether, the stunner packs six bedrooms, five and a half bathrooms, a two-and-a-half-car connected and heated garage, three decks, a courtyard, and a full lower level. And it's all

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impeccably executed. “These are custom homes masquerading as spec homes,” observes Bowyer’s architect, Gary Beyerl of Burns+Beyerl Architects in Chicago. “His homes have everything a family could want, and he’s really thought about fulfilling the needs of this segment,” says Coldwell Banker broker Elizabeth Ballis, who Bowyer hired to market all of his properties. No wonder it sold 29 days after he put it on the market in November. But fret not, potential buyers: Bowyer has two more nearby properties on the market with similar assets, both ready to deliver in the fall and up for sale now.

Bowyer, who is showing himself to be an astute judge of his buyers’ needs and wants, left behind a successful career as a strategy consultant to start Middlefork in the fall of 2008, at which point the housing market was crashing fast. “It wasn’t the best of times,” he concedes wryly. But the former architecture student-turned-finance guy had a plan: “The luxury market was still good but had elongated time frames. So I decided to follow a boutique model and do two houses a year,” he explains.

He stacked the odds in his favor with a shrewdly picked team. “Gary Beyerl is acclaimed for his exquisitely detailed residential work,” notes Bowyer. “He introduced me to our builder, MC Construction Group, and they were not only more economical than every builder I interviewed, they were better. And I’ve known Elizabeth for 13 years. She was my personal broker.”

Right on schedule, his first completed home

hit the market in 2010, and Ballis sold it for \$2.7 million in 85 days. The spec house next door languished for several years, notes Ballis. And his was the highest-selling property in Lakeview that year. Thanks to his savvy design sense and strategic game plan, today he’s five-for-five after his next four sold (or six-for-five if you consider that first house resold in December 2012 in less than a week for \$3.05 million).

How difficult is it for a residential developer to succeed in this economic climate? “It’s like rolling a 1,000-pound ball up a hill,” quips Ballis. Yet each of Bowyer’s projects has sold in less than 90 days thanks to his scrupulous attention to every aspect, from choosing proven pros to design, build, and market each home to the hands-on attention he lavishes on each one himself. “He even does his own staging, right down to the flowers,” marvels Ballis. “And he’s so selective that he buys the pieces he uses himself.”

Bowyer humbly calls himself “lucky,” but he clearly has his prep—and an understanding of the opportunities his market niche offers—down pat. “I did such extensive research to understand my market segment’s needs that I had a grasp of what I had to do from the start,” he says. “But now I’ve had such good experience managing and pricing properties that I believe we’re delivering a superior product for the price. And I figure if I made a go of it in a down market, we’ll be pretty busy as things pick up.” **MA**



Expansive windows and detailed woodwork grace the living room.

## THE RIGHT STUFF

Andy Bowyer handpicks items on every project from a trusty list of sources.

- Paint:** Benjamin Moore  
“Great coverage, durable, and amazing color palette.”  
[benjaminmoore.com](http://benjaminmoore.com)
- Lighting fixtures:** Visual Comfort  
“Stunning fixtures and an incredible range of choices.” [visualcomfort.com](http://visualcomfort.com)
- Plumbing fixtures:** Advantage Kitchen & Bath Gallery, Niles  
“All the best brands under one roof.”  
[advantagebath.com](http://advantagebath.com)
- Hardware:** Clark & Barlow/Studio 41  
“Unbelievable variety and fair prices.”  
[shopstudio41.com](http://shopstudio41.com)
- Stone:** Stone Source  
“Incredible offering of exotic products from around the world.”  
[stonesource.com](http://stonesource.com)
- Tile:** Urban Archaeology  
“Extensive offerings, especially of artisanal tiles.” [urbanarchaeology.com](http://urbanarchaeology.com)
- Appliances:** Custom Appliance, Lombard  
“Again, all the best under one roof and incredible service.”  
[custom-appliance.com](http://custom-appliance.com)
- One-stop shop:** Restoration Hardware  
“Great trend-driven design at a great value.” [restorationhardware.com](http://restorationhardware.com)



The kitchens in Bowyer’s homes feature Sub-Zero, Bosch, and other top-line appliances.