

Changing Lives

Cynthia Bennett & Associates brings a modern touch to area homes

By Alison Stanton

For more than 40 years, Cynthia Bennett & Associates has been the leading residential design firm in the San Gabriel Valley.

Today, the South Pasadena-based design and build firm continues to change lives, one house at a

time.

CBA was founded in 1981 by Cynthia Bennett, one of the first female general contractors. In 2020, her daughter, Carolien Fehmers, also a general contractor and interior designer, took over as CEO.

To date, the firm has rebuilt

and remodeled more than 900 homes in the Pasadena, San Marino, La Canada and Altadena areas.

“Because we are a design build, we not only draw the plans, but we do the construction as well. We are an all-in-one firm with design, construction and interior

design under one roof,” Fehmers says.

CBA has been successful because they use stable, durable building materials, which sometimes do cost more.

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Chris Mortenson/Staff

Carolien Fehmers, pictured here, is the daughter of Cynthia Bennett, who founded the firm in 1981. Fehmers joined in 2007 to manage the interior design department.

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“Clients don’t call us back for repairs once we finish the project. We get a call back 20 years later, telling us they still love their kitchen and bathroom but want to update the space. There are a lot of ways to do construction. We build using materials that last the test of time.”

CBA specializes in open plan design, often starting with the kitchen-great room. It offers easy access to the outdoors and is the ideal representation of laid-back California living.

By opening walls between rooms, the firm transforms multiple home spaces into one large kitchen-great room.

For example, in a recent project in Altadena, CBA took a dining room and kitchen and removed the walls separating it from the living space.

Because the walls were structural, engineering was involved in the project.

They put a 1,500-pound, 18-foot beam and a 16-foot beam hidden in the ceiling to support the structure of the house and the roof.

“We also changed out the flooring throughout, from old oak floors to a more modern engineered plank look, unifying the previously separate spaces, and we updated the kitchen with new cabinets, countertops and new fixtures and fittings,” Fehmers says.

The kitchen island was also separated and moved closer to the seating area to create more versatility.

“A more modern space was born with easy access to the outdoors, kitchen, family room and dining room. The clients are thrilled with the new look for their house,” Fehmers says.

In addition to remodeling the kitchen and dining room, CBA also updated the guest bathroom.

CBA emphasizes the architectural integrity of the homes they remodel.

For instance, one of the firm’s biggest talents is the ability to combine the modern with the old, while keeping a home’s architectural elements in complete alignment with the style of the existing house.

“We go as modern or as traditional that the clients want to go, but the trend is classic with a mod-

Chris Mortenson/Staff



Carolien Fehmers, above, calls her mother, Cynthia Bennett, an inspiration.



The firm specializes in open plan design, often starting with the kitchen-great room.

Cynthia Bennett & Associates/Submitted



By opening walls between rooms, the firm can instantly transform the multiple home spaces into one large kitchen-great room.

ern twist, which we can definitely deliver.”

To keep clients on track and prevent them from going over their budget due to change orders, CBA doesn’t start construction until every detail — such as tile and cabinet selections, hardware and paint colors, light fixtures and countertops — have been specified and included in the plans so that everything is executed seamlessly.

The firm can also accommodate eco-friendly, energy-efficient and sustainable green projects.

“My mother started Cynthia Bennett & Associates when I was about 15,” Fehmers says.

“Once I joined the firm, I realized my true calling was home interiors. All the experience I had acquired from fashion and cosmetics could easily be translated into houses.”

Fehmers lived in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, until age 12. The European influences have guided her daily.

“I remember my mother regularly taking us for lunch to the different museums,” she says.

“Cynthia actually started her career in The Netherlands, where she was already designing before

moving to Pasadena to start CBA. I was around design from a very young age.”

The background has come in handy.

“Since getting my contractor’s license in 2020, I’ve found that it’s very helpful to have a color and interior design background when doing construction. A lot of contractors don’t have that expertise. If you’re able to visualize the look you want and do space planning early on in the design process, you’ll achieve a much better end result.”

As Fehmers notes, everybody at Cynthia Bennett & Associates enjoys the fact that they change lives for the better every day.

“It’s very gratifying to tear something down, then make something more beautiful that someone is going to live with and share with others.”

Cynthia Bennett & Associates
cynthiabennett.com