

HOUSTON

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Dynamic
Duo

**Tristan
& Jose
Berlanga
Of Tricon
Homes**

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At A Glance

Jose and Tristan Berlanga

by Alex Griffin

The Berlanga brothers—Jose and Tristan—are the creative force behind Tricon Homes, homebuilders who established a Houston presence ten years ago with a company that continues to grow and gain market share.

- They moved from Mexico City and became full time Houstonians in 1986
- Launched Tricon Homes in 1997; it has grown from a company of two employees to nearly 50 employees with a target of \$75 million annual billings for the current year
- Education: Jose—Graduate, University of St. Thomas, Houston, major in Business and Economics; Tristan—Graduate, University of Houston, major in Environmental Design
- Hobbies: Jose—work; Tristan—listening to music, playing guitar, reading
- Civic: Jose—plans to get very involved with Shriners Hospitals for Children; Tristan—focus is on education, contributes to neighborhood schools

From what aspect of homebuilding do you derive your greatest fulfillment?

Today's home buyer is very savvy, well informed and well educated. They do plenty of research when it comes to such a high ticket item. Over the years, when you begin to build a reputation for commitment to the housing industry and to the Houston community, rather than of a builder that is only here to take advantage of a business opportunity, people rapidly identify it and everyone wins. Our employees win because they are proud of what they do for a living and are fulfilled by our accomplishments. Our customers win because they get the chance to buy a beautiful product with the best value, quality and finishes that they can afford, one located close to downtown and all of the activities that our city offers—theaters, restaurants, museums and parks. And Houston wins because we are gradually improving the look and feel of many important areas to a level that should proudly represent this city.

As successful homebuilders, what is your greatest motivation?

By nature you have to be extremely motivated to operate a constantly growing business. Patience, passion and some serious sacrifice are amongst the many attributes required in this field.

What is your greatest challenge?

It is extremely challenging to forecast so many unforeseen obstacles and to juggle each and every demand that this business presents. There are definitely some difficult days but we always come back to one conclusion: to keep focusing on maintaining the quality and creativity of our product and try our best to please every one of our buyers.

Is there a secret to your success?

There is not a perfect formula and there are certainly no secrets, but timing does help tremendously and it can mean everything in business. Ten years ago when we started, there were great land opportunities which really helped our growth. Today most of the land is overpriced in relation to the current home sales prices and there is absolutely no margin of error. You must really know what you are doing. Another good ingredient is to love the industry enough that you keep seeing beyond the painful and often expensive setbacks that consistently come up. If you enjoy what you do, just like any other field, you stay with it simply for that reason.

Despite your growth and gain in market share, you continue to be recognized as a "Heights builder." Is that a fair characterization?

Not any more. Even though we offer one of the widest varieties of styles, designs, floor plans, elevations and in many neighborhoods at different price points throughout the inner loop, we started building only in the Heights for the first few years so that reputation stayed with us. It is now changing rapidly.

Is there one aspect of the home buying process that you consider as the most important?

There are so many to consider but one of the important ones is to understand the current living standards, life styles and market trends within your market. If you don't understand what buyers are looking for you will have a problem building the right home. We also insist on meeting our buyers' needs, not only before, but also after the sale of a home. Taking care of new homeowners after the sale is finalized is very important to us.

You have spoken of being in business "for the right reasons." Can you be more specific?

To us, being in this business was always about a passion for designing and building homes. There has always been a great satisfaction for us in watching the tangible results of our work. We started not for a promise of success but for the love of the trade.

What do you like most about Houston?

Houston's geographical location and climate make it an ideal city for progress and growth, a place that has attracted families and business from all over the country and world. Diversity of its people and cultures is evident in the variety of restaurants and businesses. Houston is fast becoming a very cosmopolitan and internationally known city full of energy, excitement and opportunity.

You are brothers, but you are also best friends. How has that related to the development of your business?

Our close partnership has helped us continue to do our best. We have two different types of talents coming together and we combine them well. Trust is also a vital part of any relationship, and in this partnership we have complete confidence and trust in each other.

A final question we ask of our At A Glance subjects: If you could have lunch with anyone, past or present, who would it be?

Jose: Emeril, Bobby Flay or Wolfgang Puck. And my brother better be sitting right there next to me because we both love food.

Tristan: My whole family. Other than that, anyone who has a good story to tell and a few jokes.