

What buyers want

From main-floor master suites to spa-style bathrooms and quality cabinetry, consumers expect features that reflect the rising prices of new homes

Pedro Arrais

Times Colonist

Wednesday, January 16, 2008

Just like the average house price in Victoria -- which hit \$624,450 at the end of 2007 -- the expectations of buyers are rising. New home buyers are looking for features that enhance their comfort, security and enjoyment of their home.

Three experts -- a home builder, a realtor and an interior designer -- provide their take on the must-haves for today's home buyers:

1. ONE-LEVEL LIVING

"As boomers age, the demand is rising for no-step homes," says Mike Baier of Limona Construction. "Clients are now asking for a main-floor master bedroom, even in two-storey houses."

The bedrooms on the upper level, Baier says, are then reserved for use by children and guests.

2. STORAGE

As land prices rise, storage space is at a premium in most new construction. In most instances, Baier says, a larger garage or a crawlspace is enough. But he says the solution many homeowners rely on are private storage



CREDIT: Photo Courtesy of Visions West Photography

Hardwood floors, designer colours, lot of light, a flat-screen TV and a master suite on the main floor -- this home in View Royal by Limona Construction is packed with the features experts say home buyers are looking for.



facilities.

"It's cheaper than building a larger house."

3. SPA-LIKE FEATURES

After the kitchen, a spa-like bathroom tops the list as a nice-to-have feature in new homes.

"Generally speaking, it is the woman that makes the final decision (choosing a home)," Baier says. "The spa bathroom, with its granite countertops and radiant, in-floor heating is extremely popular now."

Rooms with creature comforts, Baier says, never go out of style and will always be in demand.

4. GREEN FEATURES

"We are at the level where people will ask about green houses," Baier says.

"People are talking about it more, but the story changes when the buyer has to pay extra for it."

He says there is no question consumers will pick a green house, if the price is close to that of standard houses. But it is harder to sell green, if there is a dollar premium.

"Although homeowners will come out ahead in energy savings, it's hard to pull the extra dollars out of their pocket."

5. COMMUNITY

Where the house is located now plays a larger part in the decision to purchase a house," says Jack Barker, a real estate agent with ReMax Camosun. "Buyers in their

CREDIT: Bruce Stotesbury, Times Colonist

Women tend to have the final say when buying a family home, which is why, says builder Mike Baier, spa-like bathrooms are common in new homes.



CREDIT: John McKay, Times Colonist

Buyers want storage, but with the high price of land, efficient use of space is important. Sometimes, buyers don't want to give up space to storage, Baier says, choosing instead to pay for off-site storage.



CREDIT: Pat McGrath, Canwest News Service

Today's buyers prefer to have their laundry facilities close to the master bedroom and with lots of storage space, says real estate agent Jack Barker.

mid-50s and up place more value to a sense of comfort and safety in their surroundings." He says they like houses that are close to amenities, that allow them to walk for exercise and not have to use their vehicles.

6. LAUNDRY FACILITIES

Gone are the days of doing the laundry in the garage. "The new focus is to locate laundry facilities close to the master bedroom," Barker says. "It is also becoming more common to find laundry facilities on more than one level." He says where there is only one main laundry room, it is usually larger, with more storage capacity.



CREDIT: John McKay, Times Colonist
Except among consumers with children, stainless steel appliances are still a popular choice, says interior designer Janie Apostolakos.

7. LIGHTING

The aging population also desire houses that have an abundance of windows. "The demand is for as much natural light as possible as there is less call for intimate dining scenarios," Barker says.

8. DESIGNER COLOURS

Homeowners are using paint as a way of pulling together a room, says interior designer Janie Apostolakos of Sacara Designs. "More than ever, homeowners are using wall colours to bring together furniture, window treatments and throws," Apostolakos says.

9. HARDWOOD FLOORING

Wood floors are popping up everywhere, even in kitchens and bathrooms, Apostolakos says. "Depending on their budget people are using paint or flooring to change the mood of a room," she says. Recent decreases in the price of hardwood floors has helped accelerate demand.

10. ENTERTAINMENT OR FAMILY ROOMS

With the decline in prices for plasma and other flat screen televisions, rooms that formerly housed large entertainment units are being converted to multi-function family rooms. "Families are able to recapture the space by buying the sleek new TVs," Apostolakos says.

11. QUALITY CABINETS

Still the centre of a modern home, demand for Shaker-style cabinets with

simple clean lines in maple, cherry wood and walnut prevails. "There is something for every price point," Apostolakos says. Granite and quartz countertops continue to be popular.

12. STAINLESS-STEEL APPLIANCES

The only clients who shy from stainless steel these days are those with children, Apostolakos says. "They don't want to spend their whole day cleaning up fingerprints." Clients match up higher satin-finish faucets to the appliances.

13. SMALLER FURNITURE

A significant number of people are downsizing into smaller homes. "I spend a lot of time helping people re-size their furniture so that what they have does not overwhelm a smaller area," Apostolakos says.

parrais@tc.canwest.com

© Times Colonist (Victoria) 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.