



THE POWER OF DESIGN

AN ARCHITECT'S VIEW

I WAS RECENTLY watching HGTV when a show called "Hidden Potential" came on. The premise of the show is to let buyers see what a home in need of renovation could look like after a few design changes. The design expert shows the home buyers computer-generated graphics that showcase how the home could potentially look and feel after a few walls are torn down, tops are popped, and kitchens are expanded. Based on the designs they see, the home buyers then make the important decision of choosing which home to buy.

By Doris Pearlman, MIRM and Steve Lane





In Toll Brothers' Vistas at Indian Oaks Casaro model in Chatsworth, Calif., the kitchen cabinetry to the full height of the ceiling provides extra storage and/or space for display. Merchandising by Possibilities for Design.

Avoid wasted space – builder Camyco expanded an intermediate stair landing in the Cameron residence of Denver, Colo., and detailed to be a comfortable library nook.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE HIGGS © 2006

Watching this show really drove home the importance of my value as an architect. Buyers make decisions to purchase homes based, not only on how they look, but most importantly, how they fit into their lives. If buyers can't envision their most treasured belongings, their friends and family, or themselves enjoying time in a home, they won't buy it. That is why it is extremely important as an architect to ensure that every space has a functional purpose, whether it is a closet or an outdoor courtyard.

In order to attract buyers, the architecture of the home requires a detailed, meaningful plan and a distinct exterior statement. The exterior expression of a home is one of the most powerful selling points. If a home doesn't look good from the street, potential buyers won't stop. Buying a home is the largest purchase most people

will make, so the exterior should reflect who they are and how they feel. Quality, detail, form, color, and theme must be paramount considerations, regardless of home size. This drives home the architect and author Sarah Suzanka's philosophy that people value quality over quantity and look for comfort, beauty, and detail.

Once the attention of potential buyers has been caught at the curb, the floor plan and the merchandising come into play. The celebration at the entry of a home is a key ideal that is often overlooked. Passing through a trellis or portal into a front courtyard with a calming fountain or intimate outdoor fireplace is a welcoming experience that allows the home owner to say goodbye to the outside world. Visitors also know that they have arrived even before they get to the front door. This sequence of arrival experiences should be followed by a continuance of views through the home as the front door opens. The addition of simple wall niches

in the entry hallway provides opportunities for artwork to be showcased. In the case of a two-story home, the stairs should be more than just a pathway to the second floor; it should be a dramatic selling feature. For example, the intermediate landing of a typical U-shaped stair is a great opportunity for a cozy window seat or a small, intimate library nook.

The essence of any floor plan, big or small, is the openness of the plan. Meaningless walls that constrain and compartmentalize a floor plan do not foster

feelings of freedom and relaxation. This becomes extremely important in developing smaller homes. Another very important plan consideration, especially in today's economy, is the ability for a plan to be flexible, to easily adapt to different buyer profiles in spatial experience and floor plan square footage. For example, Kephart has designed a 1,750-square-foot, single-story floor plan where the den can flex to become a formal dining room or an outdoor side courtyard for boomers, an additional

bedroom for a growing family, or a separate master suite for an aging family member. With the addition of optional bedrooms and a second story, the plan can flex up to 2,200 square feet.

In addressing the selling power of a home, the interior furnishings and design need to partner with the architecture in order to create effective memory points. A well-designed home will leave buyers with at least two or three stand-out features to close the purchase in their minds.



Views from the front door through Metropolitan Homes' Vallagio at Inverness in Greenwood, Colo., invite buyers in, while creating a great sense of openness and continuity with the outdoors.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE HINDS © 2008

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It must be recognized that the architecture and interiors work together from the start.

AN INTERIOR DESIGNER'S VIEW

Many years ago I got my first job designing two model homes for a major home builder in Denver, Colorado. After at least three months of hard work and an installation from Hell, the job

was complete and the boss (who was a legend in the business) arrived for the walk through. Upon entering the second of two homes, the command was issued. Get rid of the two ottomans in the living room. My reply: "But they are so pretty." His answer was a classic. "I'm not selling furniture, I'm selling homes!" With one short sentence he defined my entire career. I never again designed a space that was "just pretty."

The ultimate goal of interior design and merchandising is to sell homes by utilizing design techniques that truly package the product, which in this case, is a new home.

A cue can be taken from designers of retail clothing stores who create interiors that exemplify their customers' vision of their idealized lifestyle. From wealthy and aristocratic to young and hip, those retail stores provide the ultimate atmosphere to influence



Notice the trim in the tray ceiling at Toll Brothers' Sorrento at Dublin Ranch Brescia Model in Dublin, Calif. Emphasizing architectural details creates an interesting focal point. Merchandising by Possibilities for Design.



In Toll Brothers' Sorrento at Dublin Ranch Varese Model in Dublin, Calif., the open design allows the kitchen to become the social and functional center of the home. Merchandising by Possibilities for Design.

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the buyers to hand over their credit cards. Then we have nationally known brand furniture stores which have also read the same play book. Room settings for their stores and catalogs make the buyer fall in love with their surroundings. The challenge for the interior designer/merchandiser is exactly that. Make the potential home owner fall in love with your home.

After years of working within the home building industry, I've outlined these specific goals for designing for increased sales.

- Interior design showcases architectural positives and minimizes negatives.
- Interior design and merchandising demonstrates the lifestyle of the potential buyer profile.
- Interior design overcomes objections.
- Interior design creates memories.
- Interior design sets the home apart from the competition.
- Interior design enhances perceived value.

The Future of Interior Design and Merchandising

We know that the national trend in home building is toward smaller homes. The economic conditions

have coincided with a growing consciousness to preserve and utilize our natural resources in a thoughtful and aware manner. Growing out of this we have a vision for the smaller "New American Home."

With smaller spaces come challenges. Where and how will buyers entertain their friends, store their belongings, display their collectibles, and live their lives without separate rooms for each function and time of day?

Home builders, architects, and interior designers who understand how to meet this challenge are on the 2010 high road. Rooms that demonstrate dual function while appearing relaxed, spacious, and

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In Toll Brothers' Vistas at Indian Oaks Cesaro model in Chatsworth, Calif., ebony horizontal wood adds character to a smaller space, but must be carefully used. Merchandising by Possibilities for Design.



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irresistible are “where it’s at.” How do you appeal to diverse market segments, but with a common need in mind of maximizing smaller floor plans? The key to maximizing spaces is two words: relaxed lifestyle. Understand that the separate formal living room has become the “dinosaur of the home” and that a room for each and every time of day is not affordable or practical.

Tactics and Techniques

Hiring an experienced, professional interior merchandiser in the early stages of your project can help ensure that your floor plans have unimpeded traffic flow and most efficient use of space. Developing an understanding of

how spaces borrow visually from one another and flow seamlessly together can expand the visual perception of size. Suzanka asks in her bestselling book, *The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live*, “Are bigger houses really better?” As Steve mentioned before, Suzanka believes that people should value quality over quantity and look for comfort, beauty, and detail. My conclusion: this book published in 2000 was the harbinger of things to come and is now more important than ever. If I were to pick out two items that have the greatest impact on potential buyers, it would be the choice of surfaces for floors, countertops, and walls. Designers need to add details that create and enhance

the perceived value and excitement of the home. Well-designed hard surfaces for floors, walls, and counters are not an option, they have become a necessity. Manufacturers of these products have recognized the need and therefore have created an ever-expanding selection of wood, tile, and stone products that illicit the “wow” or “must have” response so important to sales.

The next greatest impact would be moldings that add dimension, interest, and character to a space. Color is also one of the essential elements in the updated “design tool box” for 2010. Buyers have become intensely aware of the importance of color. It is a powerful tool in creating

memorable interiors. Gone is the old-school perception of keeping all surfaces light and/or white in sales. In smaller spaces, color can be your best friend. Use it on accent walls or incorporate it into design details to add character and depth to interiors. Lighter colors used throughout can add warmth and identity.

Doing Double Duty

When it comes to visualizing multiple uses for rooms, your buyers may need just a little help. Clever use of merchandising may show them how a dining room or great

room can double as a home office by simply adding an open laptop on a coffee or dining table.

A secondary bedroom can serve double duty as a mini-gym or a grandkid's sanctuary. A guest room/office combo is another idea that buyers of all ages will appreciate.

Some furniture pieces can work extra hard as well; consider the ottoman/coffee table that is so popular today.

Making Memories

Last but not least, how do home builders create that unique mem-

ory that will set them apart from the competition? The answer: Develop an in-depth understanding of the potential buyer's lifestyle and how it fits into the home. Then define one interest or hobby that would take precedent over all others, and design a whimsical room around it.

Sales success in 2010 is all about understanding the relaxed way we are living today and designing new homes that respond to the buyers' need for warmth, color, and detail. Small on space doesn't have to mean short on livability, luxury, or style. *SMI*



With ample space, the base of the bed is a perfect to place a sitting area. Toll Brothers' Sorrento at Dublin Ranch Mantova Model in Dublin, Calif., is a great example. Merchandising by Possibilities for Design.

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