

Creative Living

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Homey-rama

Idea homes get 'lived-in' look



Don Lonski (left) and Carl Freiwald are part of the design team that did three of the 12 houses in this year's Homearama, held in Livonia this year. Believability is the design firm's trademark.

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

A LOT OF clients of the interior design firm of Perlmutter and Freiwald never live in the homes decorated for them. In fact, they never intended to. The Franklin firm has become of the area's foremost designers of builder/developer model homes.

For the fourth straight year the designers have been selected to furnish model homes in Homearama. This year the showcase of homes is being held in Livonia, continuing through Oct. 12.

Three of the dozen models are Perlmutter and Freiwald creations — Bonadeo Builders' Tudor, Biltmore's Dorchester and Curtis Newport.

The specialty accounts for 25 percent of the firm's business according to Carl Freiwald, half of the partnership of Perlmutter and Freiwald. With Jack Perlmutter and 26 employees, the designers operate from a Franklin road address with warehouses in Oak Park and Farmington.

WORKING WITH builders requires a little more than just being a good interior designer, Freiwald said.

"Our objective is to sell the product — the home. We work with the same builders over and over again, so we must be successful. A lot of decorators just want to show their designs."

To sell that product, Freiwald said, requires looking at the people who are likely to buy it.

"We look at the product. Who is it targeted for economically? What's the age, life style, part of town? We try to key that toward the builder's market."

While the majority of P & F's regular individual clients own homes of \$200,000 and up, Homearama models and other builders' projects undertaken have ranged \$150,000-\$175,000, a prime consideration in planning.

"Livonia, for instance," Freiwald said, "is a family area. We wouldn't put in slick marble and glass tables with white leather couches. We're creating warm, comfortable, family-oriented homes for Livonia."

P & F's contract with builder/developers ideally begins before the construction crews ever see the site. The consultants often advise on architecture, room-planning and exteriors as well. Involvement in the early stages allows the principals to buy furniture and accessories specifically for a project. They visit New York, Dallas and other design centers frequently on buying trips for models.

"THE BOTTOM LINE is will the customer buy the home. A lot of times it's the interior that sells a home. We give them what they want and expect in that home. Are they expecting marble in the master bath? In West Bloomfield it's a must. Is it a \$160,000 home in Farmington Hills? Ceramic baths are a must."

A potential customer must feel comfortable in the home and able to relate to living there, Freiwald said. "We have to make the models believable. We rarely use way-out furniture forms; the average customer has to be able to project themselves there. We wouldn't



The "gathering room" in the Newport model has a lived-in look, complete with an afghan casually positioned on the couch.

show a floating bed and electronic gadgetry. It has to be conservative, within the realm of believability, without being boring."

Part of the trick of believability are the little touches, said Don Lonski, P & F's "ace in model design." Once the tone, direction and color have been selected and the floor and wall coverings and major furniture chosen, Lonski steps in to add the final touches — towels, soaps, flower arrangements. For a recent Sterling Heights condominium project, he stopped at a local flower store to see "what was desirable for that area. It was not orchids. In Bloomfield, you can get a little wilder."

Lonski's touches are evident in the Homearama models — sports posters in a teen boy's room, a doll's tea set and fashionable barrettes in a young girl's room, oven mitts on a kitchen counter, a knitting basket of yarn and needles.

The idea is to give it a unique character, something to remember, Lonski said. Several years ago it was a bedroom scenario — a bed with stationery on it and a half-finished letter extolling the new home. It ended "Whoops. There's someone at the door to deliver the Seville . . ." There was a Seville in the garage, and the idea, Freiwald said, was a real showstopper. "It sounds dumb, but it's interesting that people notice that attention to detail."

THIS YEAR'S showstopper is likely to be the life-size plaster monkey installed by Lonski in the greenhouse of the Dorchester model, complete with his basket of bananas.



A youngster's room gets personal touches of books and games plus bedtime pals in this bedroom in the Tudor model.

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Occasionally the designers are too successful and model viewers relate too well. Freiwald tells of the time they filled empty brand-name perfume bottles with colored water to put on display. The bottles were pilfered. "Next time we filled them with vinegar."

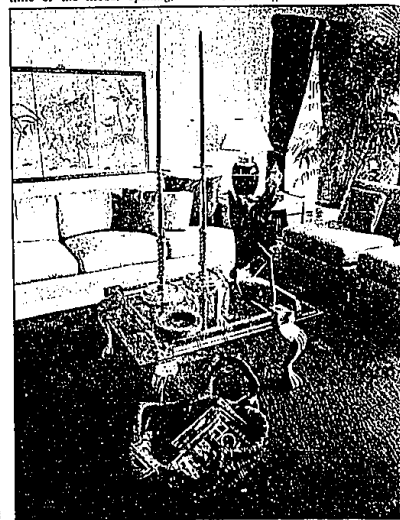
Model visitors have also poked holes in lacquered bread on display and even taken bites. Small strips of wallpaper have been ripped off the walls for samples.

Builders' schedule delays have also meant times when P & F staff people have worked right up to the time of the model opening, and

sometimes beyond. In one Southfield project, scheduled for a VIP open house at 6 p.m., they started bringing the furniture in at 5 p.m. while 10 guests stood around waiting for entry.

The delay posed little problem for the designers, except for the canvas covered couch, which was to be hand-painted. The couch was completed, guests were let in and two staff people were posted to prevent guests from sitting on the still-wet fabric.

"One lady in a cocktail dress got by," Freiwald said. "She now has a P & F original."



Magazines are a personal touch in the Dorchester living room.



Believability popped up in the greenhouse of the Dorchester model where the design firm planted a life-size plaster monkey — complete with its own basket of fruit.

Staff photos by Bill Bresler