

Building Scene

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING



Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102

Thursday, September 10, 1991 O&E

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Plain or fancy — How do you dress a model house?

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

What you see is what you get?
Truth in advertising?
So, exactly what's included in this price?

All the flash and excitement that goes along with models can be a cause for confusion for potential home buyers, according to Richard Komer, president of the Wineman & Komer Building Co. in Southfield. Komer said during the last year he has noticed a trend in "dressing down" — more model homes will be basic models without the frills. Traditionally, a builder's model includes all the extras — more square footage, fancy trim work, upscale lighting fixtures, extra space, finished basements, better cabinets, skylights and larger bathrooms, to name just a few.

The problem, Komer said, is when a prospective buyer comes in to look at a model, it's difficult to discern what comes for the advertised price and what's extra.

"Let's say you have a \$500,000 home with \$250,000 in amenities — you have a real stunning house, but when the buyer finds out what he sees is \$750,000 (and the home was presented as a \$500,000 home), the people are mad."

This strategy works just as well in the \$100,000 homes as in the \$500,000, he said. "People are doing a lot of comparison shopping, and if you have a home with all the extras, it's difficult to do that."

KOMER SAID that he has tried two models — one dressed up and the other basic, but showing the extra features through displays and pictures seems to work just as well.

And if a buyer wants to purchase upscale features, his sales staff can

show units under construction, Komer said.

"A base model is still very nice. It may not have a hardwood floor entry, or top of the line cabinetry, or extra trim, but a base model should in no way be anything less than a complete home."

Nor does it mean the home is under-decorated. "We'll still have furniture, curtains, paint and wallpaper — we still want to show a home as some place lived in."

"We want them to walk out with a good impression."

Builders have traditionally dressed up models with luxury features, additions and upscale interior decorating to show buyers what options and upgrades are available, Komer said.

Komer said he believes most buyers are aware that models are dressed up versions of the basic model but still doesn't make visualizing the basic model any easier.

While these models give a good idea of what a home's potential is, they don't convey what the buyer gets for the advertised price that brought the buyer to the development in the first place. "If someone bought the model as presented, it would generally cost thousands of dollars more because of the added amenities," Komer said.

But having only basic models makes selling the extras more difficult. "We have catalogs, displays and pictures of what (the amenities) — it makes it a bit harder to sell the extras, but I think we have a better rapport with them."

ELLEN WHITEFIELD, marketing director at Selective Group in Farmington Hills, said a bare-bones, basic model breaks with traditional marketing strategy.

"That first impression is too im-



In the future, builders will be "dressing down" their models so buyers can see what the base price brings. If this base model living room at Boulder Park was the typical model of five years ago, it probably would have included skylights, more ex-

travagant light fixtures, a marble floor-to-ceiling fireplace, areas of stone before the fireplace, an oak mantle, wood beams along the cathedral ceiling, custom wood trim around doors and windows, granite flooring in the kitchen.

ports (to not impress them)," she said. "The idea behind models is to grab the customer's attention, even allow the buyer to dream a little."

"We firmly believe a well-merchandised model is our best tool," Whitefield said. This often includes

homes with extra amenities not found in the base model.

But, she added, "if we advertise a home for (a certain price), that home is available." There may not be a model — although there often is, a basic model, but there are at least detailed plans.

Whitefield stressed that model home strategy — building a home that is more than the basic model — was developed to show buyers the possibilities — not to be misleading or confusing.

"When a builder shows a model, he wants to show what can be done — either what they can provide or what (the homeowner) can do later," she said. It's not uncommon that a buyer purchases a base model, and then

adds the amenities himself later.

Some models have more than others. "We want to show a home just as they (the target market) would live in it," she said.

When a home is targeted for a certain family, the idea behind the model is to excite that buyer. A base model may not accomplish that, she said.

Well merchandised means different things for different homes.

Whitefield said that when the Selective Group starts a development, it begins with a marketing study to determine what the buyers they are targeting will want at home.

In a more-moderately priced home, options displayed in the model are fewer, in an upscale home, mod-

els include all the amenities, she said.

HARRIET BRANDT, president of Candle Lite II Interiors, a model merchandising/consulting firm, in Farmington Hills, said both approaches are going to appeal to people, but the basic merchandising strategy is still adding all the features.

"You want people to buy what you're selling — if it's a plain Jane, it's not going to impress them," Brandt said.

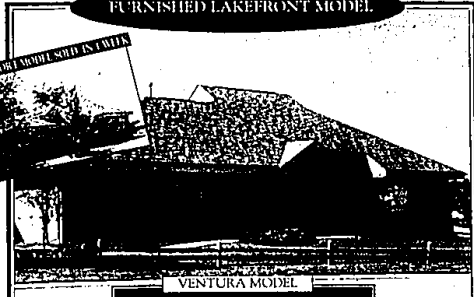
Showing homes with all the extras, after all, is really to the builder's benefit — a buyer who doesn't see

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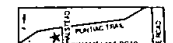


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