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Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102



Economy pares extravagance in new houses

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Paralleling the trend back to comfort foods, today's new house buyers are craving things that recall an earlier era — french doors, kitchen pantries, oak flooring and glass block.

Of course, today's houses are updated with extras grandma never dreamed of like comfy kitchens with built-in appliances and food preparation centers, in-suite baths, home offices and an emphasis on energy efficiency from windows to furnaces.

Add a weak economy and you have a change in what buyers are seeking.

"A couple of years ago when the economy was expanding, young successful people with good incomes were looking for glitz," said William Spagnoli, a Plymouth builder and developer.

"It's like gasoline. When it's expensive, people will conserve. When it's cheap, they'll use all they can."

Today, buyers are pulling back a bit.

"We're looking at a more conservative buyer who likes stylish trends, but not excessive things, not wasted space," Spagnoli said. "You don't need a 20-foot by 20-foot open foyer. At least half of home buyers today are making a wise choice in the efficiency rating of furnaces."

Spagnoli spoke while tending Country Manor, one of a cluster of

model homes in the Quail Run development in Plymouth Township. The site will include 74 homes and 58 condominiums. Country Manor is priced at \$239,000 with about 3,000 square feet.

COUNTRY MANOR'S decor, furnished by Ray Interiors of Farmington, feels warm and inviting from the big farm kitchen table and butcher top cabinet to the area rugs scattered over hardwood floors.

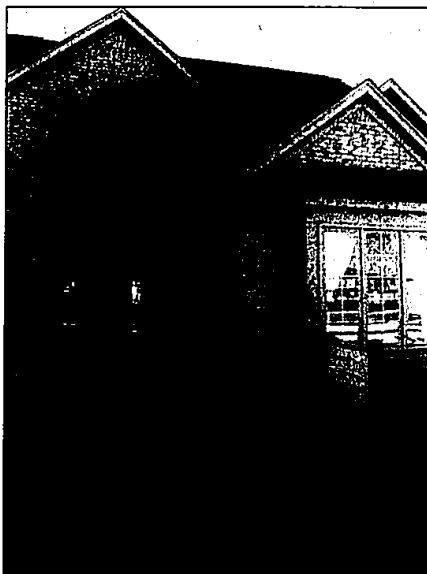
Spagnoli said buyers are going to brighter, more colorful interiors. "We're mixing earlier features with new colors," he said. "The earth tone era is over. Lots of bright natural color is in."

And the return to the traditional applies to the house exterior as well as seen in extra peaks, bay windows and the use of copper and fieldstone.

Visit Heather Hills where houses are priced in the \$350,000 range, and you'll find builder James Bonadeo has incorporated many of the same warm features from natural wood flooring and lots of painted wood trim to french doors and dominant staircases with heavy wood banisters.

"Jim builds very traditional homes," said broker Patricia Neff. "You'll see the 10-foot ceilings, the crown molding, french doors, beveled glass, two fireplaces. We've never gotten away from traditional in this area."

The Heather Hills models offer an



JIM JAGGELD/staff photographer

The Embassy model at Laurel Estates in Livonia spells tradition to buyers willing to spend \$245,900.

example of the continued use of glass for architectural impact. The full walls of windows arch near the ceiling to present a dramatic soft sculptural appearance. The window treatments by Troy Interior designer Mary Oik allow maximum light but lend an artful feeling to the room.

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— William Spagnoli
builder, developer

AT LAUREL ESTATES, a new development on Seven Mile, east of Newburgh in Livonia, tradition is also the trend.

"People today are not as extravagant," says Harry Wolfe of Prudential Realtors. "They want wherever they place their money to be a safe return. They're not as gaudy. They're very resale conscious."

While Laurel Estates also borrows heavily from the past, modern touches include a food preparation center in the kitchen, built-in appliances, three-car garages and bathrooms galore. The Embassy, a four-bedroom colonial, has 3½ baths.

"Two and a half baths are minimal today in a two-story colonial," Wolfe said. "The old days of standing in line for the bathroom are not practical with today's quickly moving lifestyle."

Models at Laurel Estates range from 1,830 to 3,075 square feet, \$179,900 to \$245,900.

BUYERS WITH their hearts set on a more contemporary look may have to look in Oakland County. That's what Brenda Burkhardt did. The Novi woman, with husband and two preschoolers in tow, is hoping for a January move-in date at Woodland

Ridge, a contemporary development on Walnut Lake Road in West Bloomfield.

"I love the windows, the open floor plan, the high ceilings, the dramatic entry — that kind of feeling," said Burkhardt, who was ironing out details Saturday with a sales representative.

Another couple, retirees who live near Middlebelt and Maple, were gushing over the models — an Aspen chalet with angular geometric-shaped rooms, and the Huntington, a dramatic home dressed in black and white from the large tiled checkerboard foyer and kitchen to the bold black and glass staircase.

"Most people really like them," said Lesley Schneider, sales representative for Ivanhoe Huntley Homes.

Woodland Ridge will have 86 units of contemporary and traditional houses when complete. Square footage will be in the 2,995-3,325 range, and prices in the high \$200s.

But even with the dramatic contemporary look, the same trademark features of the '90s are apparent — large kitchens with built-ins, first-floor laundry rooms, impact window walls and numerous bathrooms. Grandma would be envious.

Build kids' self-esteem, building consultant says

By Brian Lysaght
staff writer

More than two decades later, Donald Tocco remembers the disappointment he felt listening to the commencement speaker at his high school graduation.

Tocco and his classmates were told that 95 percent of them would be either dead or dependent on Social Security at age 65.

"I found that to be very disheartening," said the 44-year-old Troy resident and businessman. Tocco described himself as an unmotivated student, but when he heard the disheartening statistics he vowed to return to his alma mater, Warren Lincoln High School, with a more positive message.

He did in 1977. "It actually went over quite well, and I started doing other addresses at schools." He's delivered speeches to thousands of students since then.

TOCOCCO SAID HE builds self-esteem by offering youngsters a businessman's view of how to enrich their lives and succeed.

"I do it for kids because I know the only way they'll have the opportunity to learn these things is from someone outside the educational system."

Tocco is president of D.L. Tocco and Associates, an industrial development marketing firm. He started the company two years after completing a Dale Carnegie leadership class.

Young people are more receptive than adults to Tocco's message, he said, though he makes presentations for corporations as well.

"Adults have got too many reasons why they think motivation will not work for them. Kids haven't experienced the failures," he said.

Tocco, who said businesses need to get more involved with schools, doesn't talk



Donald Tocco
motivating kids

economics with kids. He stresses attributes like resourcefulness, determination, persistence and planning. He said he wants kids to feel good about themselves. He suggests they start the day with a pep talk.

SOME OTHER Tocco thoughts and suggestions:

• A smile gets you further than a frown.

• Kindle a burning desire: Achievers must be willing to face and overcome obstacles.

• Set specific goals: All great achievers had specific, refined goals and a time frame within which they accomplished them.

• Have faith: Have confidence in yourself and whatever higher power you believe in.

• Be persistent: Resist the urge to

quit. Search and work until you uncover every opportunity.

• Take courageous action: The best way to overcome inertia is to move steadily forward to a bold and adventurous goal. Act with confidence and kindness.

IN 1987 he developed his Youth Enrichment Program aimed at fourth graders. The age group is at an important stage in development of self-esteem, Tocco said. He delivers the program one hour per week for six weeks.

"He's a dramatic person and you can't help but get enthusiastic when you're in the room with him," said Carolyn Plask, principal of Farmington's Kenbrook Elementary.

The Kenbrook children loved the program when Tocco presented it last year, she said. "It was especially great for the boys. It was a male role model who told about how he got motivated."

He's also done programs at Birmingham's Greenfield and Bingham Farms elementary, and Troy's Morse Elementary.

Last week he organized a one-day program for children from seven Detroit-area schools featuring several motivational speakers for children from seven schools. The forum was sponsored by General Motors' Electronic Data Systems division.

Tocco talks to schools for free, taking time from his company to do so. He describes the letters he gets from youngsters as "better than any paycheck."

D.L. Tocco and Associates Inc. specializes in developing industrial construction companies, a business he said remains steady despite the economic climate. His company has eight employees in three cities, and has had collective sales of about \$750 million since he started it in 1974, he said.

1992 Homearama sites set

The Homearama Committee of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan has announced three sites for the 1992 Homearama program. They are:

• Oakland Township — Gunn Road west of Rochester Road. Date is May 6. Developers are Scott Jacobson and Michael Chiro.

• Detroit — Dickerson between Jefferson and the Detroit River. Date is June 3. Developer is the city of Detroit.

• Sterling Heights — Ryan Road at 19 Mile. Date is Sept. 3. Developers are Dominic Mocerri and John Carlo.

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Residential building drops

(AP) — Construction of new houses and apartments plunged 2.2 percent in September, heightening concerns that the economy is in for a second dose of recession.

The Commerce Department said Friday that housing starts totaled a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.03 million. That was down from 1.06 million units in August and broke the first five-month string of gains in 11 years.

The report followed other government statistics showing flat industrial production; falling exports, formerly a source of economic strength; and weak spending by consumers, who account for

two-thirds of the nation's economic activity.

"I really think it's panic-button time," said David F. Seiders, chief economist for the National Association of Home Builders.

Daryl Delano of Cahners Economics, a Newton, Mass., forecasting service, called the latest report "worrisome," and said "the economy could stall out and give us the classic double-dip."

But he said he did not believe the economy would fall back into recession. "I think the economy is idling now and will move forward eventually," he said.

ALL REGIONS of the country except

for the South experienced a decline in housing starts last month, and the South failed to recoup its loss of a month earlier.

Revisions in the report also showed the level of new construction nationally in July and August lower than first estimated.

Seiders said the latest Home Builders' survey suggests housing starts may be down in October as well.

"Everything deteriorated," he said. "Sales activity, buyer traffic and builders' own expectations of future sales activity all eroded."

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