

BUILDING SCENE

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THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 1992



MARILYN FITCHETT

Houses rate as the main event

As it's never been suggested that I attend an Optimists Anonymous meeting, I'll pass on promoting the potential "rescue" of the city of Detroit based on the construction of a new subdivision along Jefferson.

Yes, it's great to see houses going up instead of being demolished. And what former resident doesn't hold at least a bit of a soft spot in their heart for the old hometown?

But are any of these reasons for suburbanites to cross Eight Mile or Telegraph for a trip to the Detroit Homearama? Perhaps not.

Sentimentality aside, there is one good reason to go. And that's the houses. Perhaps more than any Homearama in recent memory, this parade of homes is one to which the average buyer can relate. Which is not to say that if you've seen one moderately priced house you've seen them all. Don't expect to see Plain Jane bungalows and ranches from the cookie cutter school of design.

Colonials, Victorians, split-levels, contemporaries, traditionals, Cape Cods — all have been custom built, showing that a reduction in price needn't be a limiting factor for creativity. Features such as additional bathrooms, walk-in closets, and game rooms that are missing in yesterday's housing stock are nicely incorporated in these houses. And extras that once were found only in pricey houses are available in the Homearama models. Ceramic fireplaces, skylights, master suites, cathedral ceilings, central vacuum systems, tray ceilings and whirlpools are some of the extras in Homearama models that builders say buyers want.

And they should know. Before the first crowds made their turn on Dickerson just about every model was sold. Builders like Janet Compo of Farmington Hills were signing up buyers for the next phase of the subdivision.

So should we expect to see future Homearamas with houses in the more affordable price range? Not necessarily.

Like auto makers, builders make more money on larger houses. But success feeds on success, and if there's anything builders have learned in Detroit, it's that buyers of smaller houses are interested in the whistles and bells found in larger homes. And it's those goodies that can spell profit for a builder.

Buyers who think of "affordable housing" as a euphemism for cracker box housing should demand more of builders. Innovative design need not be costlier to build than using the same dreary floor plan time after time.

Homearamas have always served as a showcase for the best work of builders, decorators and landscapers. The Detroit Homearama has placed parameters on the professionals in terms of size and expense. But it was those limitations that forced them to be more responsive to the average buyer.

Homearama continues through June 21. Hours are 3-10 p.m. weekdays, noon to 10 p.m. weekends. It is located at Jefferson and Dickerson, about four miles east of I-75.



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACKSON

Pastels and glass: Light colors, extensive use of windows and a gently sloping roofline give the Sizzler restaurant an upscale appearance.

Architects help put food on the table

■ Mention a restaurant, and the response probably will be about food. But restaurant architecture can influence the way patrons perceive their dining experience.

Architecture to a restaurant can be compared with spices to food. It definitely adds to the flavor, but exactly how much is up to individual interpretation.

"A restaurant is like a three-legged stool," said Tom Wilsom, owner of a Sizzler franchise that recently opened in Westland. "You have food, atmosphere and service. All three are equally important."

"It's difficult to say," said Gary Wright, design project manager for General Mills Restaurant Inc.

"If you consider Walt Disney World and the different restaurant designs there, can you say whether architecture brought people in — the atmosphere created — or were they hungry, a captive audience and they had to eat?"

See RESTAURANT, 4G

Whet diners' appetite with visual excitement

BY AMY LIGHT
SPECIAL WRITER

One restaurant buzzword of the '90s is "casualization" in both food and restaurant decor. Filled by the wayside are the power lunches that defined the '80s, chic and pretentious dining establishments, and the panache of the "celebrity chef."

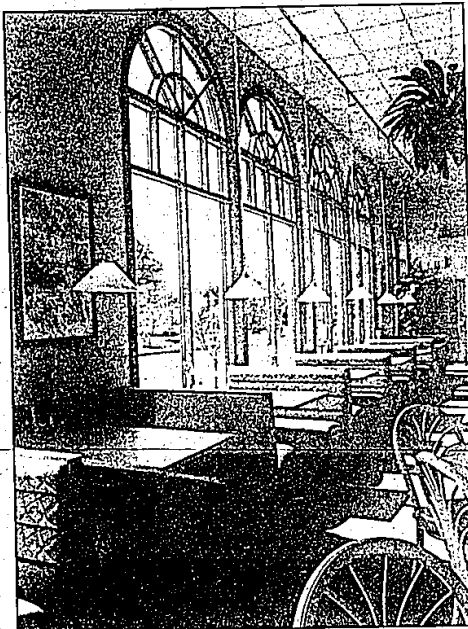
In addition to food, restaurants must draw the public with visual appeal. "You eat with your eyes," says Baltimore restaurant consultant Diane Neas, who believes in identifying one umbrella concept for a restaurant and sticking to it, from the menu right down

to the tablecloths on the table.

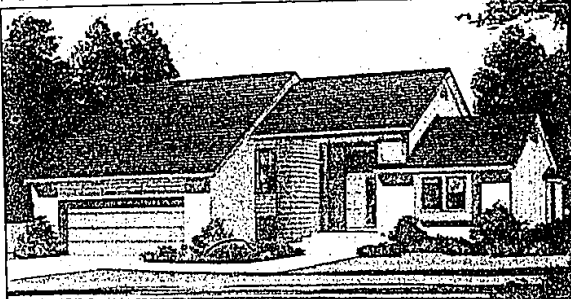
Baltimore interior designer Rita St. Clair agrees that people have become more interested in visual excitement as a backdrop to the dining experience.

"The old ideas of maintaining a quiet atmosphere have been all but thrown out," she said. "We're not as concerned with acoustics as we used to be. People want a higher noise and lighting level."

"They want to feel part of a crowd, and they want to see what they're eating. People don't want pretension... but to feel comfortable in a relaxed setting."



Inside look: High ceilings, large windows plus light carpeting and fabrics give the interior an airy look.



Top vote getter: The Essex by Singh and Shapiro.

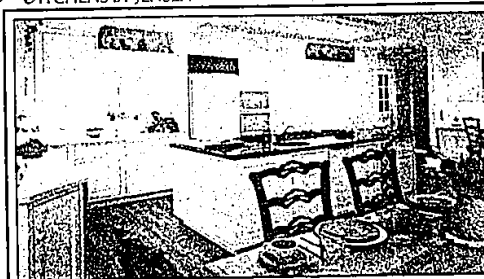
Southfield builders win People's Choice acclaim

The Essex, a 2,000-square-foot contemporary style house by Singh and Shapiro of Southfield, was selected as the most popular model of the 25 on display last weekend by attendees at the Detroit Homearama.

The Hampton model, a 2,000-square-foot colo-

See ESSEX, 5G

KITCHENS BY JENSEN



The Jensen Group



ARCHITECTS BUILDERS DESIGNERS ARTISANS

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