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"Twenty percent of buyers now want three-car garages. It's an additional holding area for a boat, work shop, golf cart, children's bicycles. It's a terrific value for \$5,000-\$7,000," he said.

Square footage in and of itself isn't as important to this buying segment as quality amenities, Whitefield said.

"They want two walk-in closets maybe with some built-ins in the master suite, a luxurious bath, a whirlpool, perhaps a separate shower stall.

"Maybe they want a library where they can do some work. They're not looking for just a big dining room, but one large enough to accommodate the family for holiday dinners," she said.

Volume space — something other than a flat, eight-foot high ceiling — sells in this market, Robertson said.

"They're looking for lots of windows, a very nice master bath with tub and shower, room for two sinks and a big walk-in closet," he said. "They're willing to compromise on bedrooms and they'll give up square footage if you give them high ceilings."

Lifestyle is more important than investment possibilities in this buy, Robertson said. Golf courses, lakes, hiking/jogging trails, pools, clubhouses and tennis courts sell well.

FEATURES EMPTY NESTER AND SINGLE BUYERS WANT

Here's the features these buyers want and the percentage who think they should be standard.

Feature	Percent
Fireplace	86%
High ceilings	84%
Bay window	80%
Microwave	80%
Separate tub and shower	76%
Ceiling fan	73%
Two-car garage	69%
Skylight	68%
Grilltop range	63%
Walk-in pantry	54%
Water purifier	52%
His-and-her-closets	51%
Hot water dispenser	51%
Double oven	49%
Spice rack	38%
Ceramic tile entry floor	35%

Source: National Association of Home Builders

"I see us doing more things to make their lives easier," she added. "Recycling has prompted some variations in kitchen plans."

Computer options and wiring allowing automation like the Smart House also will become more available, Whitefield predicted.

"People will want it not because it's new. What people are looking at is what will it do for me? Will it save me money, time?"

"The change I've seen is people aren't buying more house than they need," Robertson said. "They'll give up a bedroom and other things as long as they have volume space and feel good about the space they live in."

"Everybody wants to own real estate but nobody wants to maintain it any more because they don't have time for it," he said. "I see more servicing arrangements being offered."

August a building bonanza

AP — Construction of new homes and apartments posted the steepest advance in 18 months in August, the government reported, but analysts predicted that activity will level off for the rest of the year.

The Commerce Department said housing starts posted 10.4 percent, to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.24 million, up from 1.12 million in July.

Except for the Northeast, all regions reported gains including the South, where some analysts had expected construction to be curbed in areas drenched by Hurricane Andrew late in the month.

Analysts said the big increase was due to mortgage rates that dropped below 8 percent in August for the first time in two decades.

"It seemed to unleash some people who were waiting in the wings," said economist David F. Sellers of the National Association of Home Builders.

But Sellers contended the weak labor market will restrain housing activity during the remainder of 1992. "We certainly won't see 10 percent increases month after month," he said.

Sellers said there appears to be little speculative construction and that builders "are apparently trying to build right to the demand side of the market."

He pointed to a slight decline in August in the number of building permits, which often are a barometer of future activity. They dipped 1.6 percent, to a 1.06-million annual rate, after a 4.7 percent advance in July.

Lenard Mills, an economist with the Federal National Mortgage Association, agreed the August advance cannot be sustained, even with continued low mortgage rates. "Missing still is job growth," he said.

Still, the August increase was the largest since starts shot up 19 percent in February 1991 and the first since a 10.1 percent gain last May. They had fallen 2.4 percent in July and 4.1 percent in June.

Mills suggested the June and July decline was caused in part by wet weather. In addition to lower rates, the August rebound was helped by builders trying to catch up with rain-delayed construction, he said.

Starts in August also rose to the highest level since reaching a 1.34 million annual rate in March. The increase helped boost new construction 20.2 percent above that of the first eight months of 1991.

Single-family starts, which dropped 2.7 percent in July, jumped 8.5 percent a month later, to a 1.06 million annual rate.

Apartment construction soared 30 percent, to 148,000, after remaining unchanged in July. Analysts said the pace in this volatile sector could not be sustained.

Regionally, starts rose 16.2 percent in the West, to a 311,000 annual rate; 14.5 percent in the Midwest, to 308,000, and 9.8 percent in the South, to 506,000. But building activity fell 6.7 percent in the Northeast, to a 112,000 rate.

Kitchens: where the heart is

AP — For many families the kitchen is the heart of the home. It's the place where the family gathers to eat, to talk, and to share experiences. But creating a warm, welcoming kitchen involves more than the right look.

You must create feelings of coziness, comfort, and security. That may sound difficult, but it's not. Kitchen and Bath Ideas magazine suggests the following ways to put "heart" into your kitchen:

- Fit furnishings to people. One measure of homeiness is hospitality, the ability of a kitchen to be physically accommodating. Physical comfort promotes psychological comfort. Sitting areas should be furnished with an easy chair or two, so guests can vary their positions to maintain comfort. Arrange cocktail tables so your guests can retrieve a glass or coffee cup without undue stretching or scooting.
- Cater to the nesting instinct. Despite the common longing for large kitchens, there is such a thing as too much space. Vast space can jeopardize feelings of security. Often, the people who occupy a large room are left feeling insignificant and exposed. Before you settle on an oversize kitchen and family room combination, consider what puts your family at ease. Not all open floor plans are bad if consideration is given to creating cozy people places. Maybe you need an extended kitchen with defined areas for dining and relaxing. Those areas should be user-friendly — the furniture should be comfortable, and quiet conversation possible.
- Small rooms, cozy nooks, and alcoves cater to our nesting instincts in a way large rooms almost never do.
- Warm it up. Like space and furnishings, finishing materials on the floor, walls, counters, and cabinets evoke emotional responses. Sleek materials such as metal, granite, marble, and laminate are often regarded as cold, formal, even glamo-

rous. Wood, tile, slate, brick, and butcher block evoke a warm and casual feeling.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't use the formal materials. Their effect can be tempered by combining them with materials that have a warmer image. If you prefer granite counters, balance their stone-cold character with a wood floor. If you've selected laminate cabinetry, warm it with wood trim, butcher-block countertops, or tile backsplashes.

- Color also can enliven a kitchen. Greens, blues, warm reds, buttery yellows, teals, and jewel tones are the kinds of rich hues often associated with at-home elegance and graciousness.
- Enclose for comfort. It's no accident that large windows and sliding glass patio doors are being supplanted by divided windows and sets of French doors. Architects, designers, and homeowners are coming to the realization that large, undivided expanses of glass produce a feeling of being exposed. On the other hand, large windows and doors that feature muntins (narrow framing members that divide the panes of glass) seem to provide a reassuring sense of enclosure.
- Those divided windows and French doors also create cottage-caliber charm.
- Highlight your interests. A kitchen, no matter how grand and stylish or how efficiently designed, is not likely to feel homey if it's devoid of signs of life. What gives a kitchen character and identity are telltale signs that read people — with their own tastes and preferences, interests, and eccentricities — actually live there.

Heirlooms, collections, souvenirs, family photographs, and other objects that are personally meaningful need to be on exhibit, where they can be seen and appreciated every day.

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