

# National Builder of the Year



Single-family homes with West Bloomfield Schools selling from the mid \$300,000's.



Single-family homes with West Bloomfield Schools selling from the upper \$300,000's.



Detached condominium homes on the shores of Morris Lake selling from the upper \$300,000's.



Condominium homes in an enchanting village selling from the low \$300,000's.



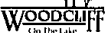
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**WOODCLIFF**

Located 1 mile west of Orchard Lake Rd., on Pontiac Trail (810) 683-3501



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## Let's follow a project from start to finish; This week: the start



STEVE SIVAK

Some readers have asked me to follow a project from the beginning to the end, to illustrate the entire process with its inherent ups and downs. I thought it was a great idea, so in addition to discussing a series of ever-changing topics related to architecture and construction we will follow the design and construction of a "custom" home that is on the boards at my office. Seeing as schematic design began in mid September, the next two articles will get us up to speed on the project and from then on I will write about the project once a month.

The project began with a phone call asking me whether I knew of any lots for sale in a certain area. I contacted a favorite real estate agent, and a computer search was made of the area. Three lots were looked at, and two were shown to the client, who made an offer on one of the lots.

The lot is heavily wooded with oaks, cherries and elms and has a 15-foot rise toward the center, with a western-facing front yard. North facing would be better,

thereby allowing the rear face to receive southern light, which is easy to control with overhangs but will simultaneously allow for passive solar heating. The lot is gorgeous and, with the exception of its orientation, is an ideal lot with plenty of space to create privacy and try some unconventional tricks that have been up my sleeve for some time.

The offer was accepted, and I thought this was too easy to be true. However, the offer was contingent upon satisfactory results of its perk-test, as all offers to buy raw land should be, and this took nearly six weeks to clear. In the end, a back hoe, which can only dig 15 feet below the surface, could not find the critical 3 feet of sand. It had to be replaced with a well drilling rig, which did find sand at 18-21 feet. This meant that a more-expensive septic system was required (\$15,000-\$18,000), and the buyer reduced his offer by \$10,000, which the seller agreed to. Things got a little shaky there, and I was wondering if anything was going to be built, but everyone was patient, and things worked out just fine.

With the closing complete, the contract was signed, and I immediately began work on the project. The program for the house was relatively simple: 2-1/2

baths, three bedrooms, dining, country kitchen (which equals kitchen plus gathering space for a few chairs and a small table) and listening/living room.

The client is a single professional on the verge of retirement, and so the master suite was situated on the first floor to diminish the need to go up and down. The master suite is deluxe and includes a private exterior terrace that the bedroom and bath open up to.

Listening to music and reading are important activities that have led to the making of the listening room, which has been designed using ideal proportions derived from current acoustical research. Due to these proportions, the floor of the listening room had to be raised in order to get its ceiling (14 foot) to align with the remaining portion of the second floor - the stairs that one takes to get to this area use 6-inch risers, which are very easy to climb.

Cooking is another major social activity for this homeowner, and the kitchen is the major public space of the house. Visible upon arriving at the house, this area uses an exposed structure, large amounts of eastern and western glazing and 10-foot ceilings. In addition to these programmatic concerns, this client

turned out to be a big fan of modern architecture and design in general. In addition, the client has come to appreciate the virtues of well made and designed objects, and the house is to be conceived of in those terms. I can respond to that!

Most homes regardless of size have certain unchangeable room relationships - this house at 3,500 square feet is no exception. The primary form-making relationship is that of garage to kitchen to dining.

Secondary relationships include foyer to front hall closet to main stairs and kitchen to pantry with laundry tossed in the same zone as well. Due to my desire to collect some southern light, the house has an overall plan shape that resembles an "L" with the short leg of the court facing south. The L shape is clearly visible in the early schematic sketches and has remained with the project to this day.

Steve Sivak is a licensed architect in private practice and an adjunct professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield. He specializes in well-crafted residential and commercial architecture and can be contacted at (313) 769-8502.

## Home sales plummeted in October

By JOHN D. McCLAIN  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP) - New home sales plunged 3.7 percent in October to the lowest level in seven months. Each of the nation's regions shared in the loss, the second straight, which was seen as fresh evidence of a moderating economy.

Sales of single-family homes totaled a seasonally adjusted 714,000 annual rate, down from 782,000 in September and the lowest since a 713,000 rate last March, the Commerce Depart-

ment said.

The drop was the largest since sales plummeted 3.1 percent for last March. And the report showed, sales in September were much weaker than the initial 816,000 estimate a month ago.

Still, sales in October remained above 700,000 for a 10th straight month, the longest stretch since a 36-month period between October 1975 and September 1979. So far this year, sales are 13.5 percent above those of the first 10 months of last year.

Many analysts had expected sales to drop to a 775,000 rate after reaching a 10-year high in August. Analysts said the \$19,000 annual rate then could not be sustained.

Existing home sales also dropped in October, the fifth straight decline, and anecdotal evidence suggests new home sales may have fallen in November.

The National Association of Home Builders said a membership survey showed a four-point drop in its Housing Market

Index last month. All three components fell, including November sales, prospective buyer traffic and future sales expectations.

Association president Randy Smith said the decline was consistent with the general economic and housing slowdown that was expected during the second half of the year.

"The very strong level of housing activity achieved in the first half of the year simply could not be sustained," he explained.

## It won't be long now!

Yes, we realize that you haven't even enjoyed the wonderful fall colors or raked all those leaves, but the Holiday season really is just around the corner.

And if you've promised yourself that 1996 will finally be the year that won't find you frantically searching for those last minute gifts, we're here to help.

Watch your hometown newspaper for two of the best holiday guides to the fine art of gift-giving.

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