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HOMES *Showcase*





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BUCKING THE TRENDS

Trends shape today's home building and buying. Learn what's popular and how a handful of rogue builders have shaped Louisville's local housing market.

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BUCKING THE TRENDS



Local homebuilders define, defy industry standards

By MANDY WOLF DETWILER
Home Showcase Writer

Today's housing market is a tricky, tricky business. Those who sell must learn the tricks of the trade. Those who build, often put themselves on the line to offer innovation at affordable prices. And then there are those few people who buck convention and head straight toward the great unknown.

The Trends

Home building has soared during the last 15 years, and recent trends have placed greater emphasis on how living spaces are used. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) held its annual convention in Atlanta earlier this month, and several seminars focused on modern trends and technology, helping to keep local homebuilders up-to-date in their respective cities.

Luxury is key, and merely decorative rooms like formal living rooms and dining rooms have made way for great rooms, family rooms and eat-in kitchens. Everything has an upgrade, from flooring to brick to windows and countertops.

And just about everything has been supersized. Great rooms and the need for more usable living space have caused floor plans to feature open rooms flowing into one another without being inhibited by walls. Ceilings soar above 20 feet with windows to match. Even garages have been widened to accommodate larger vehicles like SUVs and minivans so popular with families.

Builders have focused on how kitchens are used today, and with a greater emphasis placed on the home and family, the kitchen has become the center of attention in many modern homes.

That includes stainless steel appliances, quick-speed ovens like the Advantium by GE and an emphasis on customization like raising or lowering countertops.

In days of yore, homes used to be constructed of wood, siding or brick, or an occasional stone like Bedford. Not so anymore, say local builders who have introduced alternatives like stucco, autoclaved aerated concrete (AAC) and other synthetics. The results allow homeowners the ability to customize the exterior of the homes while maintaining the integrity set forth in local homeowner associations and neighborhood communities.

As the Baby Boomer generation ages, homes will turn toward ranch floor plans or homes with master suites located on the first floor. Some of these include widened doorways, lowered countertops and appliances and larger showers and ramps to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers. Patio homes



Above, Indiana native Brad Hicks returned to the housing market with this lovely Louisville home after a 10-year hiatus.

At right, Karim Momeni built a modern home on an unconventional lot no one else noticed. He liked it so much, he decided to keep it for his family. PHOTOS BY Wales Hunter



and planned communities have also increased in popularity to meet the needs of the senior community.

Chuck Kavanaugh, executive vice president for the Home Builders Association of Louisville, identified an emerging demographic who are already impacting the local housing market. Dubbed the "Echo Boomers," the under-23 set is highly educated, motivated and economically successful. With less importance placed on traditional families — e.g., husband, wife and 2.5 kids — these buyers demand quality housing requiring less maintenance. As such, single-family detached condominium-style homes are slated to become the wave of the future.

"We'll see more diversity in the housing market during the next five to 10 years than we've seen the past 30," Kavanaugh added.

Kavanaugh said builders have become more educated as well, attending national and even international building conferences and reading the many builder-oriented publications that have flooded the market.

"They get to hear trends that work and don't work," Kavanaugh said, and bring those that do back to the local market.

Younger builders coming onto the scene have also resulted in eclectic building styles as each attempts to make their own mark and set new parameters. Breaking boundaries set forth by older builders, some who have

Mathews are sometimes hard to cor. Some homeowners have lived in on their entire lives and want to raise the families nearby.

Isaac said kitchens, great rooms, rooms and master suites are popular reing projects in Louisville, but it's not u to see a family add an entire second onto their homes. That floor is typical for additional bedrooms.

"It's usually all doable on the lot si Louisville-area homes, Isaac added.

And as the Baby Boomers age, sorply don't want to leave their homes. Is installed elevators in several, both e and internal.

"It's not a cost-prohibitive projec said.

The Trendsetter

Iranian-born commercial builder Momeni came to America with a high diploma to study at the Speed Sc School at the University of Louisiv 1976. He received a master's degree i trical engineering and then stayed on university as the head of support servi the school's libraries.

In the mid 1980s, Momeni shift attention to building. He focused on co cial construction at first, building : functional structures like the Comple store located on Bardstown Road. Ho broaden his horizons, he turned to building as well.

Before Sept. 11 and the onslaught recession, Momeni had hoped to upscale luxury homes like those pop the East End. He said he was driving Brownsboro Road and saw a Cc Banker sale sign lying in a patch of l Thinking a home might be for sale in th he drove up a steep hill searching : house but could not find one. He then the listing agent and learned that the si advertised a vacant lot that had been chased by a builder from a developer tion, the last in its neighborhood. Th chasing builder had not realized the sc the property — a steep hill — or the shap a funky triangle. So there it sat, ignore Momeni challenged himself to build : unrivaled in the area. He bought the l bargain \$66,500 and started plans to b

"I always like a challenge," he con "That's what I'm made for."

With a neighborhood association tion of no less than 3,500 square feet o space, Momeni realized that a spr ranch like those popular today simply not be constructed on the property. So

retired from the industry, has become a challenge. "The entrepreneur spirit takes over," Kavanaugh added.

For those homeowners who like the location of their homes, remodeling has become an increasingly affordable way to remain in a neighborhood but alter a house to meet the changing needs of its owners. Mike Isaac, chairperson of HBAL's Registered Remodelers Council, says creating new living spaces or adding onto an existing home is an excellent way to increase its resale value.

"Remodeling has been rising for years," Isaac said. "I don't see that changing."

Homes in popular neighborhoods like St.

Continued on PA

Louisville's traditionalism doesn't hinder innovation

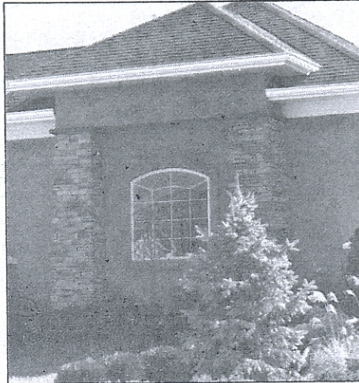
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than building out he built *up*, fashioning a three-story castle-like home with 3,500 square feet on the first floor and an additional 2,500 in the finished basement. The home took about seven months to complete and just when he was ready to sell it, the housing market declined following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Having already built the home to suit his own tastes, Momeni and his family decided to move in. "It's the best location," he said.

He has now turned his attention to homes priced below \$200,000, hoping to give first-time homebuyers a taste of luxury themselves. He says he cuts costs by being on the job seven days a week. "I came to this country as a guy with no money, and I'm proof that if you work hard you can achieve what you want," Momeni added.

Brad Hicks also entered the Louisville housing market later in his career, moving to Kentuckiana from Terre Haute, Ind., following his wife's job transfer. He has proved that giving the masses what they want can be achieved by focusing on national trends and tailoring it to the local housing market.

Hicks actually entered the construction field at an early age, working for local contractors in his hometown of Brazil, Ind., during junior high and high school. He studied construction technology at Indiana State University, honing his engineering, design and drafting skills, and then worked for a commercial builder for several years.



Non-traditional building materials, and using common materials in unconventional ways, make Louisville a builder-friendly town. PHOTO BY Wales Hunter

As the economy went through tumultuous highs and lows in the 1980s Hicks got out of building altogether, opting instead for a more stable medical sales career.

When Hicks' wife Patty was offered a job with UPS 2½ years ago and the couple transferred to Louisville, Hicks initially kept his sales job in Indianapolis. Traveling between the cities became tiresome so Hicks shifted gears and returned to his building roots — this time in Louisville.

He says building in Indiana, especially Indianapolis, has become saturated with

high-volume national builders who have priced smaller, independent builders out of the market. Louisville, however, has remained a custom homebuilder-friendly place and Hicks has been able to introduce innovation to the area.

Nowhere are trends more prevalent than at Homearama, the annual tour of homes sponsored by the Home Builders Association of Louisville. Hicks says his will include several national trends that have not been included in many local developments. First, his home will feature a steel

frame rather than conventional wood, and solid insulation. The result will be a structure that is three times as strong as its counterparts. He also plans to have whole-home automation featuring the latest technology, an in-law suite-style basement with a separate kitchen and wheel-chair accessibility. All are trends popular in other areas of the country that have only recently become occasional requests for area homebuilders.

"I'm definitely bucking the trends with this house," Hicks said. "I try to push myself and my building."

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