

Today's top ten hot home trends

By Erin K. Witt

Like all consumer products, housing is ever evolving. The homes designed and built today are very different than those built as recently as ten years ago—and the homes built in 2014 will probably boast changes and improvements over their 2004 counterparts.

Here is a list of the current hottest home trends, according to the experts. Just remember, a home is not only an investment, it should be an extension of your own unique style and a space in which you feel comfortable. Don't sacrifice your personal preferences to fall in line with what's "hot" now.

Trend #1: Spacious garages. An average two-car garage is about 200 square feet. Today's trendy four-car garage tops out at 800 square feet. This space isn't just to accommodate mondo SUVs, recreational toys, or the cars of those kids who've returned from college. Many homebuyers envision a workshop or an art studio in the open space, or just on-site storage for holiday decorations. Another popular option is a two-car garage with a tandem space—one car behind another—that's plumbed and wired to be used as an optional room.

Trend #2: Wiring. One of today's hottest home features is in the walls. Buyers want the ability to have high-tech entertainment and family computer networks, making structured wiring throughout the entire house, not just in the family room, a popular new trend.

Trend #3: Unique kitchens. A walk-in pantry is the most favored special feature in new-home kitchens, with 78 percent of respondents in the 2004 Housing Facts, Figures & Trends National Association of Home Builders survey rating it as desirable or essential. The next most important kitchen features are island work areas (71 percent) and light wood cabinets (59 percent). Kitchens are also becoming better defined as builders move away from totally open plans. *Better Homes & Gardens* reports that a visually open kitchen with a half-wall is America's favorite kitchen floor plan, while 18 percent prefer a completely separate kitchen.

Trend #4: Traditional exteriors. According to design experts from *Better Homes & Gardens*, there have been recent, significant shifts in the size, floor plans and design of new homes. Consumers are favoring a return to traditional exteriors based on earlier American and European architectural styles. Among other factors, many consumers are deciding that quality of space is as important as quantity.

Trend #5: No living room. Upscale homeowners still want and demand a well-appointed living room. In moderately priced homes, however, the living room has evolved into a study or getaway space off the foyer. About a third of potential homebuyers say they are willing to buy a home with *no* living room, said *Better Homes & Gardens*. Dining rooms, however, are still popular in all types of homes.

Trend #6: Lower ceilings. Homeowners are bringing down the volume of individual living spaces, balancing spaciousness with intimacy. The huge two-story rooms so popular a few years ago are rarely being built today. In upscale homes, buyers can now expect ceiling heights of nine to 12 feet, but only about 14 percent of homes in the United States are built with ceilings higher than nine feet.

Trend #7: More defined rooms and spaces. Consumers are asking for more clearly defined rooms and spaces. Open floor plans are giving way to innovative, semi-open arrangements. Although columns are still a popular way to subdivide areas, a newer trend is the use of partial walls to physically separate the space. This arrangement allows for good traffic flow and visual connections.

Trend #8: Activity rooms. Hectic lifestyles and world events have led to a trend called “cocooning,” where consumers try to spend as much time as possible at home. This has spawned an increase in specialized areas in new homes that cater to the homeowners’ individual tastes and activities. These spaces may include home offices, dens, sitting rooms, exercise rooms, game rooms, home theaters and media rooms.

Trend #9: Smart storage. While it’s always been important, storage space is in higher demand than ever. In addition to walk-up attics, walk-in kitchen pantries, and room-size bedroom closets, builders are adding recycling bins and appliance garages in kitchens; butler’s pantries adjacent to dining rooms; hair appliance hideaways and over-the-toilet cabinetry in bathrooms; computer niches near secondary bedrooms; and built-in entertainment centers in family rooms. They’re also making closet space more efficient with built-in dressers and smart shelving systems.

Trend #10: Boomers building for the future. With 85 million aging baby boomers, the phrase “aging in place” is taking on major significance. According to the consumer Web site, DesignBasics.com, many boomers building their dream homes are looking ahead to the future, adding special design features that will allow them to remain in their home as they mature. Commonly included are main floor master suites, an abundance of natural light, wide hallways and doorways, walk-in shower stalls, easy-open cabinets that require little bending, and levers instead of doorknobs or faucet knobs.