



March 2015

Looking Ahead for Next Year's Home Design Trends



Prognostication can be torturous territory. Only a fool goes in head first without first admitting that there is never an exact science to predicting what buyers will absolutely want in the next five to ten years.

Over the past few decades we have seen Mediterranean give way to Anglo-Caribbean give way to Tropical Contemporary. Open loft spaces evolve into family-friendly layouts. Shag carpeting and marble replaced by

a return to a variety of flooring options, including hardwood and rectified porcelain tile.

Trends are trends for a reason, and for most of us in the industry, they are critical to recognize. The difficult part is predicting which one comes next and may ultimately become entrenched as a buyer's demand.

As someone with multiple stakes in the industry (building, construction and real estate companies) I have the advantage of seeing what is selling today and using that knowledge to make smart, informed decisions on what to create for future buyers. And with the markets remaining strong and banks beginning to lend once again, cash buyers are no longer the only option. Our economy is reinvigorated. Where I once focused primarily on developing product solely in the \$4-\$6 million range, I can now include a variety of residential product in the \$1-\$2 million buyer range. But what we design today may not be ready for delivery for as long as 8-14 months, making last year's trends irrelevant. We are designing for next year's trends. Looking ahead. Bringing a new perspective. Here is where I see opportunity for home builders.

The return of contemporary, with a twist. Contemporary is a word that has often proven to be challenging to builders. I remain convinced that this design remains in its early stages and expect to continue to see a reemergence of this style of architecture. Contemporarily-styled residences can maintain critical traditional demands providing we include those necessary elements during our design phase. Smart builders and architects are adding elements such as stone to give exterior elevations movement and color, taking away some of the discomfort and ushering the concept into the next decade.

There is a focus on interior layout. With more than 150 real estate agents under the Macken Realty umbrella, we have a strong insight into what sells a property. A buyer can like what they see on the outside, but if it does not function on the inside, the home will never sell. Recently, space has been a selling point. Lofts and free-flowing open spaces were at the center of many of my projects over the past decade. But the truth is that single family homebuyers with children want private spaces. Mediterranean and Caribbean styles left buyers with segregated areas that then morphed into a combined kitchen and living room space. I think the next phase will place emphasis on creating beautiful, and most importantly, livable living areas.

The new great room: Large areas where the family can congregate, while still being able to protect and preserve the space for multiple uses.

A huge influence of technology. No one can deny the effect that Apple has had on design across the board. They have spearheaded a very hard shift into cool, crisp lines and shapes.

Additionally, technology has added a new layer to the thought process behind building. Buyers now want their homes to be intelligent. They are looking for smart locks, video monitors and home controls that oversee everything from HVAC systems, to security, to garage openers via their smartphones and tablets. Samsung's CEO recently said that within five years, 100 percent of their products will be connected to the Internet. Buyers want to know that their home was well thought through.

Lastly, are eco-friendly upgrades: From low voltage wiring design, to solar panels, buyers are realizing that they can create comfortable lives while being thoughtful about what they are putting in their homes. High-energy efficiency in everything from air-conditioning units to light bulbs is becoming more common and will only continue to grow when it comes to options.

And though most homeowners only stay in their homes for about five to seven years, buyers are finding themselves more interested in making smart choices for the benefit of the planet.

Alan S. Macken is the Principal of Macken Companies. He may be reached at alan@asmacken.com