

Boomers Are Buying Lifestyle; Transforming the Design of New Homes

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Amenities

When the first active-adult communities were launched in the 1960s, many were large in size, located in traditional Sun Belt states and shared similar community format, design and amenities. Today, the 50+ housing market is transforming the way builders design and develop active-adult homes. According to experts with the National Association of Home Builders Seniors Housing Council, builders must recognize that today's buyers are open to change and are demanding variety in home designs.

"For many buyers, the established concept of the active-adult community conjures up images of boring, cookie-cutter neighborhoods with no opportunities for owners to express themselves," said Bill Feinberg of Feinberg & Associates, P.C., a Voorhees, N.J.-based architect and designer. "Builders understand that the active-adult industry is rapidly changing. A single community formula will no longer meet the needs of mature consumers."

Feinberg added that main-street communities, exclusive enclaves and age-targeted villages within master-planned communities are gaining popularity. In terms of design, these youthful, individualistic buyers want diversity in street patterns and streetscapes, embrace natural features such as wetlands and open space, and favor smaller, more flexible communities. They also may not need a large community clubhouse, preferring more informal spaces that offer different experiences and a range of social and physical activities.

"Boomers are buying lifestyle," said Chuck Covell, president of Greenbelt, Md.-based Bozzuto Homes. "Today's 50+ buyers today are more affluent and crave a sense of lifestyle when buying a new home. They are not buying solely based on price or location."

Covell noted builders must include high-tech offices and media centers in active-adult homes to appeal to buyers who see themselves working well past the traditional retirement age. Baby Boomers want first-floor living space, including a master suite, as well as high-end kitchens, luxurious master suites, high-tech media rooms and luxurious bathrooms.

At Irwin-Pancake Architects, a firm specializing in senior housing for 35 years, the philosophy is bathing areas can be safe and beautiful. "While cost is always a factor, it is in everybody's interest to ensure that bathing facilities are not only safe and sound, but provide long-term service and value," says Douglas Pancake of Irwin-Pancake Architects.

Most architects think, "If it's going to be safe, it's going to look institutional," says Gary Multanen, Best Bath Systems President. "That's not the case with our products. We work closely with designers to ensure they understand the variety of custom looks for bathroom design, while meeting all safety features outlined by the American Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) and local codes."

According to "The Kitchen & Bath Consumer Speaks Out," a survey from the Home Improvement Research Institute (HIRI) commissioned by the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), more than 80 percent of homeowners who remodeled their kitchen or bathroom within the last year were somewhat or completely satisfied with the outcome. The research also found:

The average bathroom remodeling project includes new wall treatments, flooring and faucets.

Higher-end bathroom remodels, costing \$6,300 on average, most frequently include new faucets, flooring, shower heads, wall treatment, lighting, and a toilet.

Whirlpools were purchased for 23 percent of higher-end bathroom remodels. About 70 percent of these bathroom remodels included the services of a designer or contractor.

Renovating the bathroom is a huge project and you have to get it right the first time. While we suggest you do your own research we advise hiring both a designer and renovator to ensure a successful job. That leaves you to manage the family around the building site.

If you want a great bathroom renovation team, follow these steps:

- Compile a list of experienced bathroom designers and renovators. Calling them will give you an initial impression and you can ascertain whether they would be available to do the job.

- To find a designer you are happy with it is essential that you like their style so make sure you view some of their past work, ask for referrals and/or visit their website.
- To choose a renovator ask for details of past work and recommendations from previous clients. Then obtain and compare quotes from at least three different vendors.
- Make sure the bathroom renovator you select is properly licensed.



ANDERSON ASSOCIATES
Greenwich Real Estate Specialists

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Central Greenwich Office: 164 Mason St, 203-629-4519

Western Greenwich Office: 1 Glenville St, 203-531-6300