

3D REAL ESTATE

Condo living pluses

Whether a condominium or a house it's better to own than to rent. Just like houses, condos come in several variations. Condos not only vary in sizes, they can also vary in styles.



ROLAND HAWKINS

Condo-minium living is most popular among the elderly and young home buyers. Both groups understand the value of home ownership. Owning a condo relieves home owners of responsibility and maintenance. Yard work is not a popular chore for many but, especially condominium dwellers.

For a fee the complex's homeowners association will maintain the exterior. An HOA fee normally covers maintenance cost, master insurance policy, real estate taxes and common areas.

Regardless of your age or income, you can afford a condo in Charlotte. Sale prices will vary by location and size. The amenities offered will influence the amount of the homeowners' fees.

One of the most popular condo designs is the patio home version. This plan is most popular among the elderly. Individual and couples like homes with everything on the main floor. Patio homes can also be built with 1 or 2 car garages.

Condominiums are not always built new. You can find numerous conversions of existing structures. Many older apartment buildings around the city are converting their complexes into condominiums and selling them off as individual units. This concept is very popular near the Uptown area. Don't be surprised to see some discarded commercial building converted into condos.

The second most popular condominium style is the two-story townhouse plan. Some of these designs give you the feel of being in a single family home. You can also purchase condos with 1 or 2 car garages.

The smallest condo is the studio/loft floor plan. However, if you want to spend the money, you can purchase a larger loft/studio design. Studios located near the city are popular options of younger couples and single people who work in the Uptown area and/or desire the city way of life.

In the last decade the Uptown area has become a livelier location. What once was a weekend and after work ghost town is now consistently full of people and activities. This means that people are spending money in the city like they do in bigger cities.

In fall 2005, Bobcats Arena opened, which brought new excitement and social events to Uptown. The value of real estate around Uptown is already pricey and has increased in value.

The three rules of real estate remain the same all over the world, location, location and location. Real estate will only gain value over time. No matter if it is a house or a condo it's valuable real estate if it is in a desirable location.

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PHOTOS/ARA CONTENT

Modern kitchens reveal a range of color schemes that go beyond the traditional.

Real kitchens, real trends

ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

It's easy to open decorating magazines and daydream about all the expensive, cutting-edge kitchens inside. But when it comes time to put their cash on the barrelhead for a new kitchen, what are consumers actually willing to pay for?

A nationwide survey this spring of more than 500 kitchen dealers, sponsored by Decorative Cabinets and Kitchen and Bath Design News, asked that very question. Dealers unanimously said their business is booming - but that customers aren't necessarily buying into every trend that comes along.

"I think the biggest thing this survey taught us is that people are spending more today on their kitchens than ever - usually between \$25,000 and \$75,000. But they're still spending carefully," said Elliot Sefin, publisher of Kitchen and Bath Design News, a monthly trade publication for kitchen designers.

"After all, they have to live with their decision for a very long time. They're only willing to spend money on things they believe will truly make their lives easier," he added.

While the survey uncovered volumes of detail about customer preferences, from knobs to cabinets to appliances, it also revealed some central kitchen-industry truths:

Traditional designs are in, but traditional colors are out

When asked to rank design styles in order of popularity, dealers coast to coast generally ranked Traditional as number one, followed by

Mission/Prairie Style, Old World European, Transitional, and Country. Modern/Eurostyle was dead last.

"It makes sense," said Jill Ross, designer for Drexel Interiors, a dealer of Decora kitchens in Oak Creek, Wis. "Customers want timeless looks ... something they know they'll like just as well in 10 years. And the majority of houses are traditional in design, so traditional kitchens just flow better," she added.

While traditional kitchen designs may be popular, the standard traditional color scheme of barn reds, butter yellows, hunter greens and cornflower blues has been knocked from the top spot by a more "transitional" color palette of earth tones, with deep dark chocolates, vibrant greens, warm beiges and pumpkins.

Metallic tones such as bronzes and nickel finishes are also in vogue, dealers said. Robin's egg blue, lavender, and rich eggplant are all popular with incoming customers, who want to freshen their homes with color.

White kitchens: Not dead yet

The white/off-white kitchen, that icon of the 1990s, is a long, long way from life support, dealers say. In fact, a majority said it's still the most popular cabinet color they specify.

"This one surprised even us," said Cathy Hitz, brand manager for Decora, an Indiana-based maker of semi-custom cabinets, which are sold through more than 1,000 dealers nationwide.

"What I think we are seeing with white kitchens, though, is a greater sophistication ... the use of chocolate

glazes over white to subtly accent more complex moldings, or white cabinets paired with accent cabinets in black or dark brown for the base or island," she said.

And, in fact, there is considerable truth to the industry trend spotting, which says that light, natural wood cabinets with subtle glazes will be the next big trend. In fact, natural wood cabinets in maples and light cherry were a very close second to white, with traditional dark cherry or mahogany finishes, and contemporary deep brown shades trailing behind.

Some luxury items are becoming standard

When dealers were asked where their customers were most likely to spend their money, a few very clear winners emerged, namely, granite countertops, elaborate mantle hoods over the cooktop, nickel finish faucets and knobs, and pull-out spice rack cabinets. But what feature won by the largest margin? The pull-out garbage can cabinet.

"Used to be, the kitchen was stuck back in an unused corner of the house, away from the action. But now, with open floor plans, kitchens are looking a lot more like furniture. Molding embellishments like mantle hoods and columns help define the space and create important focal points in wide open spaces," said Ellen Cheever, a well-known kitchen designer, design educator, and columnist for KBDN.

"The kitchen is now the hub of the house, and they are demanding that

it function well. They want to plan their kitchen storage down to the square inch with storage accessories, so they'll never have to stoop or look disorganized in front of guests. They want the best hardware and faucets, which function like jewelry in the room. And isn't the pull out garbage can just the great equalizer?"

Who among us wants to dig around for the recycling and garbage bins, after all?" she added.

Growing luxury trends help drive sales

Even if you aren't a gourmet cook, high-end professional appliances have their appeal. In fact, a majority of dealers in this survey reported that they specify kitchens with high-end, professional grade appliances at least half the time.

"Stainless steel finish appliances have been popular for a long time now. But most of my customers aren't just content to have a lower end appliance with a stainless finish. They want the six-burner range, the large capacity refrigerators and the highly-engineered dishwashers. Even if they hardly have time to cook, they want to feel they have the facilities to entertain a crowd in style," said Bonnie Settle, a designer and dealer of Decora cabinets at Cornerstone Design in Atlanta, Ga.

Dealers also noted the growing popularity of under-the-counter appliances, like wine chillers and beverage centers, which keeps special items from crowding the refrigerator.

How to repaint professionally

ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

Are you hosting a graduation party this summer? Or perhaps you're welcoming out-of-town relatives or throwing a wedding shower for your best friend. Nothing motivates homeowners to spruce up their house like the prospect of entertaining.

And while you want your home to look great, it would be nice if it didn't cost a fortune or take too much valuable summer weekend time to get the job done. Even jobs that seem overwhelming can be tamed with the right tools.

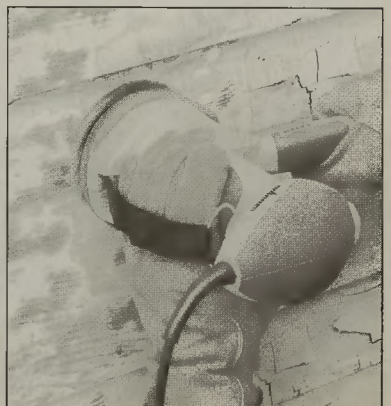
For example, the tools available for repainting the exterior of your house have come a long

way in the past few years. A quick trip to your local hardware store or big box retailer can provide you with all the supplies you need to get the job done. And you'll probably be pleasantly surprised how easy the new generation of products makes this home improvement chore.

The first and most tedious step in painting your home is getting rid of loose or flaking paint and prepping the surface for the fresh paint. A better prepped surface means that the new paint goes on smoother, adheres better and lasts longer. A new innovative tool from Wagner Spray Tech makes quick

work of this process.

The one-step, patent pending PaintEater system eliminates traditional time consuming and labor intensive steps of exterior paint prep. It removes chipped, peeling paint, feathers rough edges and smoothes the surface in one easy process so you can be ready to paint more quickly. The PaintEater is perfect for do-it-yourselfers. It's lightweight, yet tough and maneuverable with an ergonomic design that allows for multiple hand positions. The high-powered machine combines with the tough, 3M Coating Removal disc to create a perfect surface for repainting.



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