

Raleigh, North Carolina, October 20, 2008

DREAM ABODE

The latest trends shaping the future of homebuilding

Stories by Danielle Jackson

From the rise in sustainability to adaptive re-use of current structures and increasingly efficient building products, the face of Wake County literally is changing.

More than ever, homes are being constructed using sustainable practices, a method homeowners and homebuilders alike are touting for their long-lasting benefits. There's also a turn toward urban development, mixed-use neighborhoods, the use of reliable building products and the concept of quality over quantity. See what Wake County homebuilders and developers see now and for the future.

Sustainable living

Hands down, homebuilders are singing the praises of the rise in awareness of sustainable building. While they say upfront cost is more, many agree that the long-term benefits add up to savings in the end.

“People are more aware than ever of the environment and the role we play in sustainability,” says Henry MacNair, member and manager with Creedmoor Partners LLC, which is developing Hasentree in Raleigh.

“We are seeing a distinct trend among builders and homebuyers toward green design and building practices to help conserve energy, preserve nature, and improve the quality of the environment.”

At Hasentree, building envelopes limit the disturbance to the land, certified wood and salvaged and reclaimed building materials are used during the construction process, and recycled carpeting and paints with low volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are used throughout the development.

Its signature golf course and surrounding landscaping draw from the development's state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant, which is designed to recycle 50 million gallons of water each year.

Additionally, many homes are being constructed using Energy Star standards. As a result of its efforts, Hasentree has been designated a Certified Gold Audubon International Signature Sanctuary. Raleigh-based Wakefield Development Co. incorporates environmentally sensitive practices into its neighborhoods as well.

“We have always looked for ways to raise the bar in creating communities that respond to our customers' preferences for environmental sensitivity, economic concerns and social responsibility,” says Dawn Forrest, director of marketing.

At Renaissance Park, its urban-based community near downtown Raleigh, the company developed a high-density plan to help mitigate environmental impact. Wakefield Development also organized a design contest in partnership with N.C. State University to develop a landscaping approach to promote reduced water usage.

Marty Scott, owner of Maranah Custom Homes in Fuquay-Varina, agrees that sustainability is an essential element to homebuilding. Among other things, the company regularly uses Icynene, a soft-foam insulation and air-barrier system, which has been proven to create healthier indoor environments, reduce airborne sounds, and increase energy efficiency. Walker Harris, president of Chase Building Co., also has noticed an increase in the use of spray-foam insulation as well.

“We're using a lot of environmentally friendly products in our homes,” Scott says.

“It costs a bit more for these materials, but in the long term you don't have the rotting like you used to have with masonite products,” he adds. “Many of these products are coming with 25- and 50-year warranties.”

Chesapeake Homes North Carolina, which is building homes at 12 Oaks in Holly Springs and in Renaissance Park, offers Energy Star-qualified townhomes and single-family homes to respond to demand.

“Many companies are now offering incentives for homeowners who purchase these homes,” says Paul Luck, division manager.

“The industry as whole is just on the brink of green building,” Luck adds. “As the cost of sustainable building supplies decrease, the more mainstream sustainability will become.”

Product placement

From artificial grass to the use of traditional stone and brick, area builders and developers are implementing a variety of products designed to enhance the joys of home ownership.

“We see artificial grass as being on the cutting edge of what's to come,” says Jeanette Langer, co-owner of Lawrence Homes Inc., which is developing townhomes at Citiside at Beaver Creek in Apex.

“It shows that as builders we are contributing to water conservation, limiting pesticide runoffs in our streams and emissions in our air.”

Randy Ellison, owner and president of Raleigh-based Accent on Stone, says stone is popular because of its unique look, but he points to its sustainable properties as well.

“There's a connection between stone and green building,” Ellison says.

“It has a pleasing look and is unique within each home, and it's a natural insulator,” he adds. “Plus, it's quarried out of the ground. It's as natural as you can get.”

Many also tout the use of brick, a natural building material made from clay and shale, two of Earth's most abundant materials.

“Building with brick is a great way to promote sustainability,” says Jewel Warlick, marketing director with The Brick Industry, Southeast Region, a Charlotte-based trade organization representing 16 brick manufacturers throughout the Southeast.

“Plus, it ages beautifully and requires almost no maintenance.”

James Hardie Building Products Inc.'s ColorPlus system also is paving the way for the future of homebuilding.

“With ColorPlus, we take our siding, trim, and soffit materials and apply a factory finish,” says Michael Kanaby of the company's market development department.

“It qualifies for more green points because there are no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and it's durable,” he adds of the process, which is being used at The Villages of Apex.

“There's also a 15-year warranty, so we're essentially eliminating an entire paint cycle.”

What's old is new

Mixed-use neighborhoods also continue to increase in popularity, according to many. And development is responding, shifting toward urban and infill areas within Wake County.

“People are choosing to locate in central infill locations in close proximity to shops, restaurants, services and amenities,” says Bonner Gaylord, director of residential for Kane Realty Corp., which is developing high-end condominiums, townhomes and single-family homes throughout North Hills and midtown.

“We believe the trend of residences being part of larger mixed-use communities will continue and become even more popular as consumers become more accustomed to what has historically been a classical way of living.”

Another hot trend occurring locally is the concept of adaptive re-use, or adapting old structures for new purposes.

“Expensive oil and sprawl-strained community infrastructure represent dual economic realities that are fueling this trend,” says Ben Yorker, development manager with Boylan Development Co.

“As a result, historic downtown areas like Apex, Cary, Holly Springs and Knightdale will enjoy increased residential development.”

Yorker also sees urban developments clustered around a dense street system as a trend he expects to continue.

“As we all come to grips with the finite nature of our natural resources, the idea of irrigating a half-acre front yard isn't as practical as it once was,” he says.

“Likewise, the thought of heating and cooling a 6,000-square-foot floor plan is unattractive.”

Kanaby also sees a trend of quality over quantity in the current market.

“In the past, it has always been massive-square-foot boxes built as cheaply as possible,” he says.

“Now we're seeing a trend toward smaller homes with a lot more quality construction.”

What these urban, mixed-use plans lack in terms of raw acreage and square footage, they make up for with utility, proximity to other uses, overall character, and meaningful efficiencies, Yorker notes.

“We must retrofit our existing planning models to accommodate new conservation-minded techniques,” he predicts.

“This single challenge, I believe, will shape the future of homebuilding for years to come.”

Danielle Jackson is editor of Wake Living, Fifteen501 and TriadLiving magazines.

