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Margo Hass Klein
Coldwell Banker Bain
The in-demand floor plan for multi-generational households

By Marilyn Kennedy Melia
CTW Features

American families have changed a lot in the past few decades. But most homes were built for the stereotypical two parents, 2.5 children household.

“Today’s consumers are thinking about accommodations for both their aging parents and young adult children who have not moved out,” says Chris Porter, chief demographer at John Burns Real Estate Consulting.

That conclusion was reached after a survey of 21,000 prospective home shoppers, with 45 percent indicating they would like a floor plan to accommodate a multi-generational family.

A separate master suite with its own entrance, and perhaps equipped with a mini-kitchen and small living area, is what multi-generational families living together would desire most, Porter says.

But they could house hunt a long time before finding these features.

“Existing homes are typically not oriented to a convenient private access unless it’s on a second floor or to an apartment above the garage – especially if the garage is separate from the home,” Porter says.

Renovating an existing home is an option. However, “adding a second entrance could be expensive. It may be cheaper to buy a [newly built] home, unless the neighborhood is very strong.” Porter observes. In areas where home prices appreciate at a strong rate, the cost of renovation is more likely to be recouped.

Dina Petrakis of Littlerock Renovation Coaching says buyers of an existing home would have to first make sure it could be remodeled to suit their needs.

In the Chicago neighborhoods where she works, it’s popular to remodel a “two-flat,” originally built to house two families on two different floors, into one larger home, and renovating the basement as a suite with its own entrance.

Recognizing the demand, builders are increasingly constructing multi-generational homes, Porter says.

But could such homes become obsolete, should families revert back to the 1950’s Ozzie and Harriet model?

“The great thing about the separate lock-off space is it could be used for other purposes,” Porter says. Those include a home office, or a space to rent, Airbnb style.
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Innovative paper ceilings

The sky’s the limited when you wallpaper your ceiling

By Erik J. Martin
CTW Features

Looking up to see off-white everywhere in your home won’t just give you a stiff neck – it’s likely to cause you to sigh with apathy. Because the truth is white-painted ceilings are uninspired, overdone and overdue for a makeover. The solution? Think horizontal rather than vertical – it’s likely to cause you to stop and take notice. Because the view of your ceiling can completely change the look of the space, says Cutler. “Adding wallpaper to your ceiling instantly punches up the personality of any room and draws your eye upward, making the space feel larger.”

Jody Finglas, president of Finglas Painting in Croton, N.Y., agrees. “Ceilings have, for many years, been overlooked as an area that can dramatically change the look of the space,” she says. “Adding wallpaper there can brighten up the room and even make a small area feel larger.”

The availability of millions of photographic images, fine art photographic murals for walls and ceiling. Wallpapering the ceiling instantly punches up the personality of any room and draws your eye upward, making the space feel larger.”

Mark Cutler, president of Los Angeles-headquartered Mark Cutler Design, Inc., says the latter point is helping to drive this trend. “Innovation in the wallpaper industry is on the rise. New manufacturing techniques have led to better printing processes, and jumps in weaving technology have resulted in next-generation grass cloths and textures,” says Cutler. “Many wallpaper products today allow you to create what were formally very expensive faux finish techniques, such as gold leafing, at a very affordable price.”

The availability of millions of photographic images, fine art visuals and patterns that can be printed to a consumer’s specifications on adhesive-backed removable wallcoverings is another big reason for the increasing popularity of wallpapered ceilings, notes Gerry Snyder, director of marketing for Wall Posh in Ann Arbor, Mich. “Traditional wallpaper was largely made up of repeating patterns printed on wallpaper stock, with no customization possible,” Snyder says. “But with the advent of wide format digital on-demand printing and the introduction of eco-friendly inks and wallcovering materials, wallpaper choices nowadays are virtually unlimited. Textures, patterns and photographic murals for ceilings are easily reproduced to give the illusion of the real thing. You can re-create the look of beautiful clouds, night skies, even images of the Milky Way or our solar system on your ceiling.”

Finglas says the most popular areas where it’s not recommended, in fact, are kitchens and bathrooms, where steam and fluctuations in temperature can weaken wallpaper adhesive, causing it to peel.

It’s probably not a great idea to install wallpaper in very small spaces where ceilings are low, either, as it will make the space look and feel smaller than it actually is,” adds Finglas.

Obeid also cautions against choosing any pattern that’s too heavy, which can weigh down the room or cause buyer’s remorse soon afterward. “I’d suggest patterns or textures that complement the room as it stands – a striped children’s bedroom ceiling, a shimmery gold over a powder room, or a small-scale geometric pattern to make a guest bedroom feel like a hotel,” says Obeid.

Before selecting a product, “be sure to get as large a sample as the company offers and try adhering it to the ceiling in as many different places as you can,” suggests Anne Rainey Rokahr, an interior designer with Trouvaille Home in Winston-Salem, N.C. “The paper will look totally different in the bright natural light of a window versus a shadowy corner or with incandescent versus fluorescent or LED lighting. Look at it at different times of day, as well.”

Additionally, think twice before opting for deep or bright green or yellow on your ceiling, which can make your skin tones look sallow. “Pinks, reds and metallics are my favorites, as they have the opposite effect – lending a rosy glow and warm quality,” Rokahr says. Finglas recommends having crown molding installed and painted or stained in rooms where you plan to apply wallpaper up top, “as this will be a great separating point for walls and ceiling. Wallpaper never really looks good or has as dramatic an effect if the paper just runs right into the top of the wall.”

Lastly, be aware that your wallpapered ceiling may not stay chic forever. “Like any decorative thing in the house, it certainly prone to being trendy and ultimately dated,” says Cutler. “That’s why wallpaper is so great – it’s very easy to change and keep updated.”
Here come the holidays

*Five fresh ways to make a festive impression this season*

By Erik J. Martin
CTW Features

Any homeowner with even a rudimentary sense of style can trim a tree, deck the halls, and hang stockings by the chimney with care. But those looking to conjure up a more customized Christmas ambience in and around their homes have to be willing to think outside the gift box – especially if they plan to entertain friends and relatives this holiday season – say the experts.

“There is definitely a difference between decorating for the holidays and making a festive first impression,” says Felicia Ramos-Peters, founder of GetHolidayHappy.com. “Many will just put up a tree and some lawn ornaments and call it a day. But creating a festive atmosphere requires tapping into all five senses and stoking favorite memories – like the smell of cinnamon, the taste of grandma’s sugar cookies, the sight of Christmas lights, the touch of wrapping paper, and the sounds of Christmas carols as a child.”

Cynthia O’Connor O’Hara, author of “Cooking, Baking, and Making: 100 Recipes and DIY Ideas for All Seasons and Reasons” (Mango, 2017), believes creativity and hospitality are the keys to generating a memorable experience for holiday visitors.

“From the time they walk through your door until the time they leave, you can easily satisfy all their senses by creating a stylish atmosphere that’s decorated with hand-crafted items, filled with cozy scents, and tantalizing to their taste buds with the flavors of the season.”

Here are five delightful and economical ways to make your home dazzle this December:

1. **AIM FOR ORGANIC ADORNMENTS.**
   “Collect armfuls of twigs, pinecones, dry grasses, and interesting weathered branches, which can be dressed with wide ribbons or strands of crystal or pearl beads and placed in a variety of containers like vintage crocks, wooden bowls or glassware,” says Sam Jernigan, interior designer with Auburn, Calif.-based Renaissance Design Consultations. “If desired, you can also create a more homespun look by using accents of burlap, hemp and other nubby natural fibers like cotton, linen or jute trims.”

2. **BRING A CHRISTMAS TREE THEME TO A PROMINENT WALL.**
   If you don’t have room inside for a fir, spruce, pine or artificial, or if you want to spotlight a bare wall in a room where you’ll be making merry, “decorate that wall with holiday decor such as ornaments, cards received from family and friends, or lights – all in the shape of a big tree,” suggests Ana Cayeiro, interior designer with Robb & Stucky in Coral Gables, Fla.

3. **CREATE AN EYE-CATCHING TABLESCAPE.**
   “Use spools of festive ribbon to make bows that coordinate beautifully with tableware, and add them around wine glasses, candlesticks and napkins,” recommends O’Hara. “Add sparkle to your decor by placing a crystal bowl filled with ornaments on your table. And produce a one-of-a-kind winter centerpiece made from evergreens that you cut from your holiday tree or gather from your own backyard.”

4. **ADD HOLIDAY PIZAZZ TO YOUR PLANTS, TOO.**
   “I love to decorate my plants and cacti with traditional tree decor, like lights and garlands. It creates mini trees throughout the rest of your home,” says Elsie Larson, a Canon U.S.A., Inc. crafting influencer who co-owns/writes the home decor blog A Beautiful Mess.

5. **SPARKLE UP YOUR BAR WITH ORNAMENTS AND EDIBLES.**
   “Place a holiday-themed fresh arrangement of citrus fruits on your bar,” notes Howard Wiggins, a Brentwood, Tenn.-based interior designer. “This gives guests a delicious snack and lets you add fresh juice to their drinks if they want more.” It also permeates the air with a clean citrusy smell.

Speaking of pleasing the olfactory organ, it pays to spread pleasant aromas around your interiors that make guests think of the Yuletide. Larson recommends mixing fir needles and citrus essential oils for a festive scent. O’Hara’s recipe calls for simmering a few cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, whole allspice berries, and orange rind strips in a saucepan of water for three to four hours. Alternatively, try boiling vanilla, cinnamon and cloves in a saucepan, adds Cayeiro.

For more information, visit our website!

www.norpoint.com
Let’s grow old together

By Jim Parker
CTW Features

They’re dubbed active adult, retirement and 55-plus communities – attracting millions of homeowners and tenants who left the working world behind and jumped in their golf carts to revel in resort-style activities.

Many of the residential sites are gated, showcase swimming pools and tennis courts and include homes in the mid-six figures to more than $1 million. Some of the nation’s largest builders are involved in the business, constructing ranch homes, colonials and manufactured dwellings. The Villages, in central Florida, boasts more than 70,000 homes.

They’re most common in warm weather climates but also grace major metro areas. “If a retirement community in a place like Naples or Scottsdale just isn’t for you, maybe the big city would work,” contributing writer Vanessa Grout says in a Forbes Magazine article three years ago.

The seniors-friendly villages – geared to healthy singles and couples that typically like to socialize and take part in all sorts of amenities, are racking up business by attracting the baby boomer generation now aged 53 to 71, “who account for about a quarter of the U.S. population,” Grout says. “In the next decade, (baby boomers) will drive up the number of retiree households by about 10 million,” she says.

Industry veterans peg the launch of large scale retirement communities aimed at the more active customers with Sun City near Phoenix, which opened in 1960. Del Webb, at the time an owner of the New York Yankees, would head a company under his name that would go on to open a host of active adult areas nationwide. Today they include Sun City in Bluffton near Hilton Head Island completed less than 20 years ago, the exclusive Del Webb neighborhood in Cane Bay in Summerville, which opened in the past decade and another Del Webb community planned at Nexton, off Interstate 26 in eastern Summerville. Pulte Group, the nation’s second larger builder bought Del Webb in the 2000s. Jensen Communities, founded in Connecticut before World War II, develops appealing pre-fab housing communities nationwide including Southern Palms fashioned around a lake in Ladson.

Other big players are K. Hovnanian Homes, which opened an active adult community in the Lakes at Cane Bay; Florida based Kolter Homes, which opened the 55-plus village Cresswind Charleston; Robson Communities; Shea Homes; Toll Brothers; and Lennar, according to Investopedia. Grout in 2014 penned “Rules To Live By When Buying Into A Retirement Community.”

Her tips include:
• Get to know the characters. Seniors house hunters should learn about their neighbors and grasp the community’s personality.
• Check out the medical care. Not all communities have on-site health centers, and hospitals could be a good distance away. “Remote upscale communities should be equipped with a helipad for airlift,” she says.
• Factor in local tax rates. Income, property and estate taxes are all important to consider. Florida, Wyoming and Texas offer “great income-tax advantages,” but property taxes can be high she says.
• Time your buy to get the best price. Typically, purchase a home after the region’s peak visitor season. If that’s too early, “consider buying the home and renting to another retiree,” Grout says.
• Study the community financials. Some retirement communities were hard hit in the late 2000s recession, so be ready to review the homeowners’ association financial records or check for liens and foreclosures.
• Explore “membership.” There may be club memberships, annual dues or a mandatory equity ownership. “This investment may run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet its appreciation and resale value can be uncertain,” she says.
• Scrutinize the activity calendar. “In most cases, there are the country club staples – golf, tennis, swimming. But some of the most popular activities for retirees these days may sound foreign to you. Pickleball, for example, is played with paddles on what looks like a badminton court. Bocce, the Italian lawn-bowling game, is also hot, primarily because it can be played with a drink in one hand,” the contributor says.
• Research the restrictions. Pets may be one ban, another outdoor grilling. According to Grout, “You may not even be allowed to talk on your balcony after dark.”
• Consider the caretakers. “Home-watch services are common offerings in high-end communities. Some visit 200 to 300 homes per month and charge $50-$100 to open and close the house and make sure your lights, air conditioning and pool pump are working,” she says.
Easy being green

Today’s eco-friendly housing scene: It seems easy being green

By Jim Parker
CTW Features

Alternative energy sources from solar to windmills have been around for decades but always seemed too expensive on a large scale and a little flaky to catch on in a big way, something reserved for the granola and yoga crowd.

Yet just as granola bars now are regular fare on supermarket shelves and yoga studios dot cities and towns nationwide, once quirky power-saving innovations – geothermal heating and cooling, low E windows, insulated concrete forms – are moving naturally toward the mainstream.

Green efficiencies power, light up and insulate office buildings and warehouses worldwide. Eco-friendly designs are lowering long-term costs and improving air and water quality levels in homes, condos and apartments across the country.

Organizations such as the U.S. Green Building Council and agencies such as the Department of Energy grade buildings and residences as to their environmental sophistication. The ratings serve as incentives for developers and architects interested in green construction.

One such measurement of power saving that’s emerged in recent years is “net zero energy,” which determines if savings on insulation and natural resources counteract the expenses for power from the electrical grid or elsewhere.

Buildings.com this spring noted that “facilities are saving energy, water and money with ultra-efficient strategies.” The website cited a report by the New Buildings Institute that “332 buildings verified as or on their way to achieving net zero energy certification represent a 74 percent increase since the last count in late 2015.”

By the end of 2016, NBI had verified 53 projects achieving net zero energy consumption for at least one full year, up from 33 projects in 2014.

Buildings include the Santa Fe Springs office of the California State Lottery. The cost of the retrofit process totaled $5.7 million, or $700,000 more than it would have cost to just meet code, the institute says.

Meanwhile, more than 60 percent of the net zero energy buildings verified last year had also earned Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification.

A USGBC innovation, LEED is one of the more established power-saving gauges, self-described as “the most widely used green building rating system in the world.” The design barometer certifies more than 2.2 million square feet of structures daily and more than 90,000 projects total in 165 countries.

One example of LEED’s monitoring efforts was to grant a “platinum” rating this May to the Live Oak House in St. Augustine, Florida.

According to the environmental design judge, the 2,396-square-foot house adhered to “the local vernacular and Charleston’s Single Houses constructed one room wide and several rooms long to allow the breezes to flow through unencumbered, effectively combating both heat and humidity.” The property boasts “a central hallway extending in the north-south direction with an arm off of either end and a courtyard around a central oak tree,” it says.

Other features include local materials, large porches, a steeply sloped roof and the home’s setting on a 48-foot wide site featuring a 75-year-old live oak tree. Another “striking architectural feature” are the windows. “Peering out of the kitchen-dining room window, where one’s cheeks quickly cool from the breezy Atlantic wind, an adult visitor can nearly stand head to toe in the huge windows and absorb the majestic landscape,” the LEED report says.

Considered one of the “greenest” homes in northeast Florida, the house earned national and state ecological certifications, including:

• Passive solar lighting.
• Low VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, adhesives and sealants.
• Energy Recovery Ventilator-incorporated heating/cooling system.
• Hot water insulation and air filters exceed building code standards.
• Bathrooms and garage touting an enhanced local exhaust fan that operates on a timer; and all bathrooms conserving water with WaterSense toilets, faucets and showers.
• Un-irrigated, drought-tolerant grass on a 100 percent permeable lot to maximize storm water absorption and reduce runoff into the adjacent Salt Run fishing and paddling hot spot.

The house scored an Energy Star HERS (home energy rating system) index of 50, in which the lower the score below 100, the better.

Finally, the roots of the live oak tree “continue to grow below the elevated home, which add to the overall beauty,” the environmental design system says.

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