

>> BY FELICIA OLIVER, SENIOR EDITOR

50 Must-Have Features for Today's Home Buyers

What baby boomers, Generation X and echo boomers crave for their new homes

Professional Builder surveyed six experts* — architects, home industry trend experts, and real-estate brokers and designers — to get their take on the must-have features for today's home buyers.

BOOMERS OR BUST!

1 **No stairs** — Single-story homes, first-floor master suites and/or personal elevators. As baby boomers age, they'd rather not do stairs stay."



2 **Fireplaces.** They've always wanted to have one. "It's a reward for their station in life," says real estate broker Mark Nash.

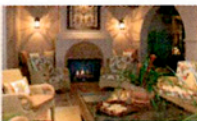
3 **Low-maintenance surfaces** such as granite, quartz and Corian.



4 **Pedestrian friendly communities** with walking trails and amenities conducive to fitness and social interaction in the neighborhood.

5 **Emphasis on quality and detailing** more than square footage. It's the McMansion theory in reverse. Baby boomers are willing to trade some space for [better] features, architect Cheryl O'Brien says.

6 **Flexible floor plans.** Rooms and spaces that can adapt to changing needs and circumstances, that are multi-functional, perhaps with sliding doors and movable partitions. "Designing bedrooms so that they can be easily converted into dens ... sitting rooms off the bedroom, etc.," says architect Thomas Barton.



7 **A keeping room.** Living rooms are giving way to great rooms; a keeping room provides an intimate space for families to gather near the kitchen area. "You can put a sofa and a couple of chairs in there and a fireplace," says market expert Cecilia Davidson-Farkas.

8 **Private outdoor space.** This could be a deck or patio. "Somebody coined the phrase, 'Does it pass the smooch test?'" says Davidson-Farkas.



9 Accessible storage. Cabinets and shelves placed at heights that can be reached without a stepladder and that have pullouts, lazy Susans and shallow shelving to keep items within easy reach.

10 Ample wall space for a photo gallery of all the kids, grandkids, siblings, and parents who may have passed away is helpful, architect Bill Kreager says.

11 Radiant floor heating. Baby boomers may have more health issues like asthma or emphysema. "Forced air becomes problematic — you don't want dust blowing around," Kreager says.

GEN XERS AND ECHO BOOMERS

12 Smart home technology. Every room should be wired for phones, modems and DSL. "They want to be able to call from their cell phone and turn the lights on and change the heat," O'Brien says.

13 Home entertainment centers. "Putting the plasma [TV] and the surround sound in your family room -- it's not that you have to have a separate destination for it," O'Brien says. Barton adds: "It's ... part of the living space, a center of activity in the home."

14 Built-in wiring and conduits for flat screen TVs. A popular location for plasmas screens today is over the fireplace. Good design provides a place for all the components, and no unsightly cords and wires.

15 A breakfast bar or nook as a secondary eating space. "Xers and Yers tend not to eat formally. They tend to graze," Barton says, "and on their way through the kitchen they pick up something to eat."



16 Green/environmentally sensitive features. Says Nash: "Generation Yers in particular will ask about it: 'Do you know of any green developments or eco builders?' That influences their buying decisions."

17 A mudroom. "A place for what I call 'dirty storage': the snow board, bicycle, kayak, and the other outdoor equipment ... usually off the garage area," Notes Barton. "This is your [bow], that one is mine," says Nash.

18 Quality closet organizers. Vinyl coated wire shelving isn't acceptable anymore. Elfe and Ikea-styled wood or plywood finishes are required at minimum. "If builders make them standard," Nash says, "people would pay the extra money."

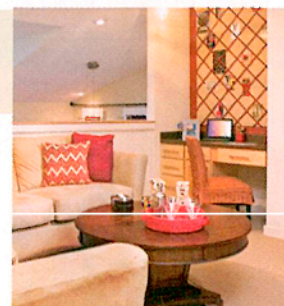
19 A soft loft look. A home with "loft-like" features, a look seen on TV shows like "Friends" and "Seinfeld," as well as commercials aimed at the Gen X and echo boomer audiences. "Brick or stone interior wall accents and veneer bricks as an accent or as a full wall" add to the feel, Davidson-Farkas says.

"We have an optional **space for a dog washing station** off the garage. Gen Xers are [more likely to own pets] than any other generation," Davidson-Farkas says. An alternative is a community dog park. "It's a new way to meet people," Nash says. "An Xer will say, 'How close is the nearest Starbucks? Echo boomers want to know about the dog parks.'"

21 Darker paints. "You need to get rid of the 'builder beige' walls. They like color. They like vibrancy," says Davidson-Farkas. For a lot of builders, "it's a paint upgrade to do these Pottery Barn burgundies and the mustards," Nash says.

22 An upstairs computer loft or "net nook." "People want an open area dedicated to computers," Nash finds. Adds Davidson-Farkas: "Parents need to be able to peek around the corner and see who their kids are on the Internet with."

23 "The echo boomers are into **natural light** like I've never seen," Nash says. "They say, 'I won't buy a condo that only faces north,' because they want sun."



SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

24



Large, open kitchens with plenty of space to prepare food and entertain guests. “Kitchens are coming out to be about the size of the grand room because it is the new living room,” says Davidson-Farkas. Adds O’Brien: “Open family rooms and kitchen entertainment areas “are here to stay.”

25

Huge kitchen islands with space for guests to sit while the homeowner is cooking, for boomers to keep an eye on the grandkids, for additional room on the counter, and extra storage.



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Quality kitchen cabinets. “With the kitchen/great room the center of family living, buyers today are looking at furniture-style cabinets,” notes Nash.

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High-quality, high-performance appliances. O’Brien’s suggestion: High-end brands or high-end features available in some affordable brands such as the GE Monogram line.

28

A separate tub and shower. “Gen [Xers and] echo boomers will take a shower over a tub/ shower combo,” Nash says. “Boomers want a separate shower and a soaking tub.”



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Separate vanities in the master bathroom. “Usually the woman says, ‘This is your [bowl], that one is mine,’” says Nash.

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Large master baths, especially for couples without kids. Boomers are looking for a “large shower with a double showerheads and a bench. ...Gen Xers are looking for the big Jacuzzi tub for two. But everybody wants the shower with the bench — ladies want to shave their legs,” Davidson-Farkas says. “Boomers want a separate shower and a soaking tub.”

31

... And more spa features. “Shower heads that are really big and come down like a waterfall out of the middle of the top of the shower, not out of the wall,” are popular, notes O’Brien. Davidson-Farkas’ group is “putting shower massage jets in all of our homes, even down in the low price points, to give that resort-type feeling.”

32

Linen Closets. “A lot of developers were taking out linen closets out of bathrooms; buyers miss them and want them back. Even if one is not in the master bath, where they expect it, it’s in every other bathroom — not in the hallway,” Nash says.

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A home management/command center. “It used to be the desk, but now it’s become a little bit more elaborate. It’s a space near the family hub where you put the mail, the computer,” O’Brien says. It’s a niche or nook.

34

An upstairs laundry room conveniently situated near the bedrooms so clothes don’t need to be carried down-stairs.



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“In homes with higher square footages, we’re seeing **a second, stackable washer and dryer** for the kitchen towels, the stuff you drop,” notes O’Brien. For baby boomers, the small stack space is for the teenager — “the wash it yourself situation,” says Davidson-Farkas.

36

Multi-functional laundry rooms that double as a family activity area, sewing room, gift-wrap station or tech area. “Each adult needs space to call his or her own,” Barton says. “Space in the laundry room can accommodate that.”

37




“Everybody needs more elaborate front doors ... on all price points,” says O’Brien. Those doors feature more glass and ironwork details. “[I’m] seeing more 8-inch front doors, where 6 feet, 8 inches used to be the norm, even on affordable, entry-level products,” Davidson-Farkas adds.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE


38 **More ornate garage doors** sometimes resemble carriage doors and are more “high-style,” O’Brien says.”

39 **Oversized garages for extra storage.** “Some people build the smallest two-car garages: extra deep, [fit for a] car and a half, because they [want] a lot of storage [for] grills, patio furniture, bicycles and the grandkids’ toys,” Nash says.

40 **A drop zone** – a foyer with built-in shelves by the garage as a place to shed coats and drop book bags. “You have outlets ... for dropping your cell phone, a place for all the junk that you come into the house with,” Davidson-Farkas says.

41  **Exteriors with natural or natural-looking materials.** “The building products industry is doing a better job of offering synthetic versions of ... cultured stone on the outside of the house,” O’Brien says. “Ten years ago, it was bad. There was no detailing. ...The industry has come a long way.”


42 **Wider balconies and decks.** “Home buyers want usable outdoor space big enough for a bistro table and chairs and a couple of pots for container gardening,” Nash says.

43  **Courtyards** “are seen as a feature for mild climates, but almost everything I’m doing has a courtyard; [it’s] really not climate specific,” says O’Brien.

44 **Outdoor fireplaces.** For outdoor entertaining, particularly in warmer climates.



45 **Low-voltage lighting** can add ambience and interest to a room. It can be used to light a pathway to an outdoor garden, or as a gentle highlight to a picture on a wall. “This plays back into that whole smart-house technology – lighting that you can have on at night ... along the wall to light the stairs,” O’Brien says.

46  “They all want **good quality Low-E windows....** People seem very tuned in to windows and window quality,” says Nash

47 **High-efficiency furnaces and water heaters.** “It’s a hotter and hotter issue [that] really spiked this year with the cost of energy,” says Nash.

48 **Bamboo wood floors.** “It could overtake maple as the favorite light-colored wood flooring,” Nash says.

49 **Built-in water purification systems.** “So you don’t have to order the bottles of water,” O’Brien adds.

50 **Carbon monoxide detectors.** Home inspectors flag homes that have only smoke detectors. Nash says one should be installed on every floor of a home.

***The Experts:** *Professional Builder* surveyed six experts – architects, home industry trend experts, and real-estate brokers and designers – to get their take on the must-have features for today’s home buyers: • Thomas Barton III, AIA, principal, Barton Partners Architects in Norristown, Pa. • Catherine Daly, president of Design East, a design and merchandising consulting firm to the building industry, in Medford, N.J. • Cecilia Davidson-Farkas of Marketing Synergy, a home-trends market research expert based in Atlanta. • Bill Kreager, principal of Mithun, an architectural design and planning firm in Seattle. • Mark Nash, a Chicago-based real-estate broker and author of “1001 Tips for Buying and Selling a Home” and the article, “What’s In, What’s Out with Homebuyers in 2006.” • Cheryl O’Brien, AIA, *Professional Builder* contributing editor and president of C. O’Brien Architects in Bala Cynwyd, Pa.