

## Hot New Home Trends

### *Practicality is in, as homebuilders cater to buyer's changing wants and needs*

The housing market may be down, but it's not out. Homes continue to be built in Connecticut, but with far fewer of the bells and whistles that many homebuyers demanded four years ago. What would-be homebuyers want — and are getting — are different today!

"We sold six homes before we broke ground on our new eight lot development, *Knoll Lane* in Avon," said Bill Ferrigno of Sunlight Construction. "Value is what it's all about, and in Avon these homes are a very good value at \$500,000 to \$700,000 for 2,800 – 3,600 square feet. I'm using house designs from a subdivision we built back in 2002. By and large builders are giving good deals, because to be successful, we have to adjust to the current buyers' market."

From energy savings to accessibility, here are the top six trends that are a *sign of the times*.

#### 1. *Smaller homes that 'live' bigger*

According to NAHB, the median size of new U.S. homes fell from 2,277 square feet in 2007 to 2,135 square feet in 2009. The overall home size is shrinking 10-15% and that brings down the price, which is the motivation for going smaller. However, good design is more important than ever because most homebuyers want their *Not So Big House* to be open, flexible and work hard to live bigger and appear roomier than it really is.

#### 2. *Home offices, outdoor living spaces and mud rooms remain popular*

Demand for home offices for telecommuting remains strong. Outdoor living space has remained a focal point even in the face of the housing downturn. Trends toward informal lifestyles, as well as more home-centered activities, have helped maintain interest in outdoor living areas. Mud-rooms are another space that has continued to remain popular and front and side porches are still in style because they help create an old-fashioned, reassuring sense of neighborhood.

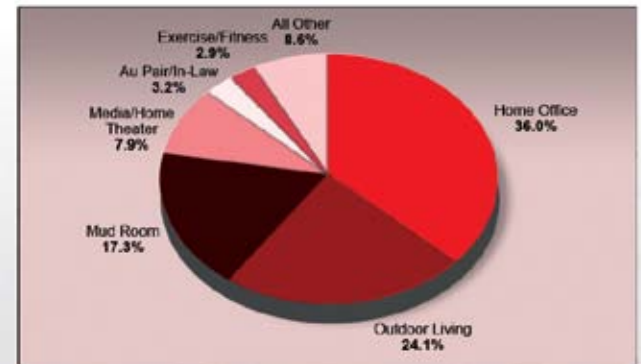
#### 3. *A 'Greener' More Accessible Home*

Not surprisingly, energy efficiency is one of the year's hottest trends. According to the 2011 *AIA Home Design Trends* survey, the few special features that are increasing in popularity focus almost exclusively on energy efficiency or accessibility. Master bedroom suites on the first floor, easy-to-use handles and faucets, and even more expensive features like ramps into the home and elevators are generally rated as increasing in popularity.

Efficiency takes many forms, including but not limited to builders using advanced insulation techniques, better windows with higher U-Value, sealed ductwork that eliminates air leakage, Energy Star rated appliances and low-energy LED lights.

**Figure 1: Home Offices/Outdoor Living Dominate Popular Special Function Rooms**

Most popular special function room, % of respondents, Q2-2011

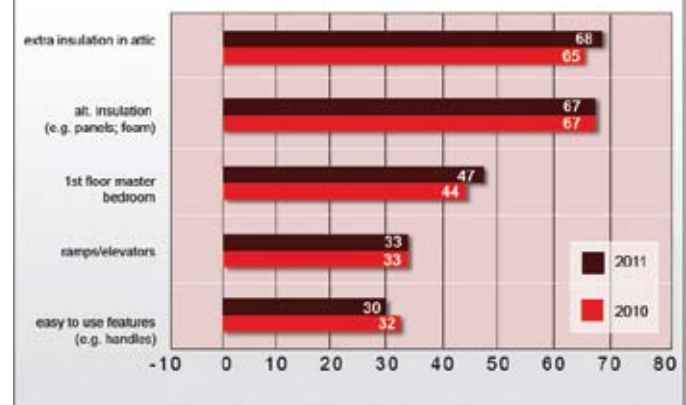


#### 4. *Higher R-Value Insulation*

"The problem with fiberglass insulation (batts or blown in) is that it doesn't address air infiltration or leakage," says Paul Paris of Zero Draft, Comfort and Energy Specialists, also an approved contractor for the CL&P and United Illuminating Energy Efficiency Fund programs.

**Figure 3: Energy Efficiency/Accessibility Remain Popular Special Features**

% respondents reporting popularity of feature "increasing" minus % report "decreasing", Q2



"Air infiltration contributes to about 40% of a homes heating and cooling costs annually. Most people always want to discuss R-Value with me and I tell them that their concern shouldn't be with the R-value but with the air barrier capabilities of the product that they want to use. The reason for this is that fiberglass, cellulose and open cell foam all have similar R-values (closed cell foam offers double the R-value, but it's double the cost of open cell per inch). Spray foam is the only one that is classified as an air barrier, stopping that costly air infiltration."

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Paris also says, “Over the next few years, the building code minimums will be raised and air sealing and building performance will be mandatory. In the insulation industry, foam is the way of the future, hands down. Specifically, Icynene foam is a pioneer in renewable, earth friendly water blown products.”

“Open cell foam insulation gives the added advantage of cutting sound transmission,” says Peter Cantone of West Haven based Spray Foam Nation. “However, closed cell increases a home’s racking strength 2:3 times, and the increased structural integrity allows 24”OC construction vs. 16” OC, so there’s less thermal bridging. You’re also less likely to have a problem with wind uplifts during serious storms.”

Spray Foam Nation is a distributor of spray foam systems and specialty coatings. Their customers are spray applicators, who promote and install better building solutions, but the company also supports builders with training classes. Peter went on to explain why they represent Premium Foamsulate and La Polla Foam-LOK.

“Foamsulate and Foam-LOK spray foams lock in energy savings by adding an exceptionally high R-value insulation system to the building envelope and the roof deck. This advanced insulation and roofing system is spray applied to any shape and substrate. It seals the building envelope to stop heat transfer through the roof deck, minimizes conditioned air from escaping, and restricts unconditioned air from entering the building.”

Mark Nuzzolo of Brookside Development in Woodbridge, CT is a firm believer in dealing with air infiltration to address energy savings. In fact, he is one of a number of builders across the country that has begun offering a **written guarantee** to homebuyers on ongoing energy savings. Others, like JFC Endeavors By Carrier Inc., ask former homebuyers for copies of their utility bills, so that they can produce a credible energy cost history for future homebuyers.

The trend to greener, energy-efficient homes is less about consumer demand and more about builders needing to offer **more value** to stay competitive, not only with other homebuilders, but also with existing homes and foreclosures.

Please see following article on the **High Performance Home** being built in Old Greenwich by

Pete Fusaro, who is chairman of the CT Green Homes Council and serves on the NAHB Green Standards Committee.

#### **Appraisers Making Headway in Recognizing Value of Green Home Features**

Even the appraisal industry, which has taken a long time to catch up, is beginning to recognize the added value a high performance, energy-efficient home offers. The continuing effort to provide recognition for the added value of energy-saving and other green features in homes will take another step forward around mid-summer when the Appraisal Institute was expected to add a green and energy addendum to its appraisal report form. Builders can fill it out ahead of time and give it

to the appraiser, who can’t always see what’s behind your walls.

Green builders have been waging an uphill battle in recent years to convince the lending community to recognize the difference between homes that are just built to code and those that incorporate techniques, systems and products that can dramatically reduce monthly utility costs, which represent a significant expense for home owners.

Builders need to educate appraisers on an increasingly important segment of the housing industry about which most appraisers still know next to nothing.

Home related products such as high-performance windows, tankless water heaters, water-saving and conserving devices, and reclaimed or salvaged materials are increasingly sought after. There is a premium that Connecticut builders are willing to pay for these products, but they’re doing their best not to pass along all of the cost to their clients.



#### **4. Low-maintenance products and materials**

The **AIA Home Design Survey** also asked residential architects to comment on consumer interest trends for home related products. Low-maintenance products and materials also remain very popular, in particular, synthetic or engineered products for flooring, siding or decking.

#### **5. The downscaled kitchen**

Here are a few factors influencing the ‘heart of today’s home’. Baby Boomers are hitting retirement age; lending standards have tightened; consumers have swallowed a slice of frugal pie, and the number of single households – particularly single women – is rising steadily. All of those ingredients are feeding demand for smaller, more budget-conscious kitchens with a heavy emphasis on style and universal design. Beyond cooking and eating, the “heart of the home” has become a café-style gathering space for family and friends

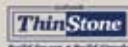
With this in mind, GE has recently expanded its value conscious Café series to include French door and side by side refrigerators, wall ovens and cook tops. This line appeals to clients who love to cook and entertain and who desire high-performance appliances that are easy to install and practically priced. GE Café series have the look of stainless steel, but are focused on **value** and **performance**. This affordable suite comes with all the features home chefs expect, and the fact that each appliance is free-standing, also makes them an easy upgrade. GE builder

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distributor, CAFD, has recently installed a GE Café series vignette in their showroom to make it easy for builders to send their customers in to try them out.



*GE Café Series in CAFD Showroom*

**Old Lyme Kitchen Remodel: Making Good Use of Space**

Amity Construction & Design demonstrated that good things really do come in small packages during a recent kitchen renovation in an historic home in Old Lyme.

The tiny kitchen - a mere 9½ feet long and 8½ feet wide - was in dire need of storage space and style. The only problem: *expansion of the historic structure was not an option.*

Amity's design staff overcame this challenge with a creative redesign that provided the homeowner with the storage she desperately needed with the panache she desired.

One of the key features is an upper cabinet above the typical upper cabinet. These compartments run around the tops of three walls, greatly increasing storage. Also, drawers were installed in the toe kick area at the bottom to utilize every spare inch of space; spice pullouts on either side of the stove allow the homeowner to store spices that she has collected from around the world, and several drawers were installed as well as a lazy Susan corner cabinet to maximize space.



Some of the unique touches incorporated into the design include:

- A fireclay farm sink that was handmade in England
- Leathered countertops to give a textured look and feel as well as a timeless appearance.
- Wide plank oak floor boards milled from reclaimed barn beams which have a patina that can only be achieved with age.

The finished product is a masterful combination of style and function in a small space.

**Luxury for Less**

"Every kitchen should have at least one special design feature," says kitchen designer, Mary Jo Petersen. "But it doesn't have to break the bank. Think backsplashes that provide a unique point of interest with an interesting pattern or antique artifact. Plate racks, exposed stemware holders, and glass cabinet doors also provide stylish accents that don't cost a fortune."

One simple way that builders can conserve costs without sacrificing functionality or good looks is to combine certain appliances. "If you have a cook top and a separate wall oven, you will spend 15 to 20% more than if you buy a range that includes both."

In a small space, the entire kitchen becomes a focal point, so it's important to attend to every detail. "Smaller spaces are less forgiving," Petersen said. Little things matter. For example, refrigerators and other appliances should run flush with cabinet faces to maintain clean lines.

Two additional areas, in particular, that can make or break a small space are outlets and endings. "You can maximize the impact of your cabinet design and backsplash by integrating or camouflaging outlets with plug molding, decorative plates, or undercounter strips," Peterson said. "And be sure to design the returns on moldings, especially when the design includes cabinets of varying heights or depths. Or when the cabinets return into ceiling molding."

Practicality, function and multi-purposing are the three maxims for today's kitchen. Function is preferred over size, and doing more with less space is a key consideration. Kitchens will have areas devoted to charging laptops, mobile phones and PDAs and a built-in work space for doing bills or homework. But one critical element has not changed! Making a kitchen a family space is still a priority.

**6. A home that makes life easier by being more efficient**

"Today, value is equated with features that contribute to efficiency," says Stephen Melman, NAHB director of economic services.

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*This pantry was supplied to builder, Steven Lecher by Royal Closet*

That's why walk-in closets in master bedrooms, well-designed laundry rooms and kitchen pantries and mud rooms are likely to continue as the most requested items in homes. **Royal Closet** in Norwalk provides customized storage for any space. Organized mud rooms, garages, laundry rooms, pantries, linen and master closets are the hot button features that turn today's buyer on. Storage may not be as dramatic as a home theater or pilates studio, but they sell homes because today's more practical homebuyer wants their home to work for them.

## CAFD Showroom Draws National Attention from GE

*GE National General Manager tours 10,000 s.f. CAFD showroom with its live GE Profile, Monogram and new GE Café' equipped kitchens. CAFD is the only showroom in the country to display and use the new super energy saving GE GeoSpring™ Hybrid water heater.*

This summer, GE General Manager, Matt Rose, travelled from Louisville, Kentucky to visit Connecticut Appliance and Fireplace Distributors (CAFD) and tour their award winning 10,000 s.f. showroom. CAFD is ahead of the curve, as with their unique outdoor living showroom, which opened this summer; their iPad equipped sales staff for improved customer convenience; and their working display of the groundbreaking



*GE national V.P. Matt Rose, Doug DuPont of CAFD, Northeast Regional Manager Vinnie Porecca & GE Regional Rep. Jeff Stokes in CAFD showroom.*

GE Hybrid electric water heater – the most energy efficient 40 gallon water heater you can buy. The new GE GeoSpring™ Hybrid reduces water heater operating cost up to 62% and saves approximately \$320 per year. The CAFD display promotes the current \$300 tax credit available to GE GeoSpring™ Hybrid purchasers, as well as a new \$400 rebate for replacing an existing electric water heater.

“I am impressed that our new GE GeoSpring™ is providing all of the hot water for the CAFD showroom,” said Matt Rose, as he snapped a photo of the display with his smartphone. “This is the only display like this in the country.”

The CAFD showroom won a state HOBI Award for innovative design. Fully working and trimmed out fireplaces and stoves are shown in room settings; home technology products are integrated throughout the showroom, and there is even a fully equipped home theater. CAFD also holds cooking demos in their working kitchens, which feature appliance suites from every leading appliance manufacturer. In addition to GE Profile and Monogram kitchens, CAFD owner, Doug DuPont has installed the newly launched GE Café series of appliances, which Matt Rose and GE Northeast Regional Manager, Vincent Porecca noted on Monday's showroom tour.

CAFD is the leading supplier of home living products in Connecticut. The company spreads the word about its CAFD Advantage on their interactive website [cafd.com](http://cafd.com), which is iPad and smart phone friendly. They offer a **Deal of the Week** on major brand appliance, fireplace and home technology products and promote these deals on both their website and on facebook. [com/cafdhomeproducts](http://com/cafdhomeproducts).