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ADVENTURES in All-Frills Housing

LUXURY FEATURES HAVE BECOME THE STANDARD AS BUILDERS STRIVE TO ONE-UP THE COMPETITION

BY BRIDGET MCQUATE



Bob Jones photo for Anthony Builders

Luxuries like hardscaping are now standard in many new Lehigh Valley homes.

Remember when only the most expensive homes promised “luxury”?

If so, you’ve just dated yourself. Today, virtually all new condos, townhouses and detached homes include luxury features like sprawling master baths and gourmet kitchens – even finished garages and hardscaping.

Why? It’s the commercial version of keeping up with the Joneses. Frank Alexander of Anthony Builders, Freemansburg, Pa., explains, “There are so many builders here, including 12 national builders, that competition is really stiff.”

To sell homes today, builders must do more – often much more – than satisfy basic needs. They must fulfill more of the buyer’s utmost desires

than the builder next door.

Yes, extravagance affects price. But creative builders offer some significant frills even in less expensive models.

NO LONGER “THE NECESSARY”

“The bathroom has become a self-indulgent place where you go to relax,” says Phyllis Koze of Kay Builders, Allentown. Salon baths accommodate exercise equipment, double vanities, all-glass shower stalls and separate soaking tubs. Walls or glass-block partitions separate “privacy toilets.” No more waiting to get in the shower while someone finishes his reading.

In the shower – an increasingly large shower – pulsating water jets massage every body part. And if that doesn’t hold your interest, many baths now have built-in

flat-screen televisions – viewable from the tub or hydro spa.

Kitchens went deluxe ages ago. Vinyl flooring? What’s that? Today, tile or wood flooring is almost standard, and provides a warmer, more upscale ambience. Appliances are usually stainless steel and often restaurant quality. Separate salad sinks boast water purification systems and instant hot water. Blair Custom Homes now features a kitchen-accessible computer nook. Kay Builders accents its kitchens with a variety of lighting styles and colors.

THE BACKDOOR VACATION

Crave a waterfall in your back yard? Blair builds ‘em – along with outdoor fireplaces, water spas and built-in barbecues. Anthony Builders has created settings that mimic woodland campsites. Or how about a pool house? It’s not just a place to change into your suit. Newer pool houses often include bathrooms, fireplaces and kitchenettes.

Pavers, meanwhile, have replaced concrete for decks, patios, walks – even driveways. And they’re often laid in creative designs and coordinated colors.

New home exteriors stay new-looking longer because today’s siding and trim are made of composite materials that resist rot and shrinkage. Elaborate window schemes incorporate myriad shapes and sizes, with simulated multi-pane windows providing a more affluent image. Entire walls of windows are increasingly popular as well.

For those with bigger budgets, all-frills housing includes elaborate wine cellars with tasting tables – often on the first floor. High-tech systems control lighting, televisions, audio, telephone jacks, security alarms and intercoms. Even townhouses and condos now have elevators.

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Even the garage can have luxury features like high ceilings, finished walls, insulated doors and trim.

RESOURCE LIST

Blair Custom Homes

Bethlehem, Pa.
610-865-4200, www.blaircustomhomesinc.com

Anthony Builders

Freemansburg, Pa.
610-865-9314, www.anthonbuilders.com

Kay Builders

Allentown, Pa.
610-395-6857, www.kaybuilders.com

THE FINISHING TOUCH

Garages in today's new homes often have space for three or four cars. These garages are also decorative, multifunctional spaces. Garages in Blair's two-story carriage houses include guest quarters and kitchenettes. One has a vaulted ceiling and a mini basketball court. Anthony Builders gussies up its garages with high ceilings, finished walls, insulated doors and trim.

Increasingly, garages are detached from the main house. Homeowners walk to their cars via a "porte cochere" (roofed walkway) like that connecting the wings at George Washington's mansion at Mount Vernon.

Most of us aren't in the market for a mansion, but as long as plenty of us are in the market for a new home, Lehigh Valley builders will be vying for our business with mansion-like amenities.

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