

SEASONS OF LIFE

Spring's New Beginnings

Of all the seasons in a year, none quite embrace the optimism of springtime. It is a time when everything in nature speaks of a new beginning: trees and flowers begin to blossom, brown, matted lawns change to green as new sprouts push their way to the light, and singing birds return from their winter vacations. Spring is an optimistic, fresh start for the year, with a great deal of anticipation for the warm weather ahead. First-time home buyers experience something quite similar to the spring season. Many are young married couples, some just beginning their families. But all of them, whether married or single, are experiencing the search for a home in a different way than they've previously looked for a place to live. Their former rented residences or years of living at home were never intended to be long-term. For the first time, they're planning to own their own permanent place. Their optimism is high as they see their future from the excitement of these beginning stages. They've finally made it. And they realize their new home will only be the beginning of many great things to come.

Generation X

Today's first-time home buyers consist mainly of the individuals of Generation X, along with the tail end of the Baby Boomer generation. As a result, this group comprises one of the most unique market segments in history. Often unfairly categorized as slackers, Generation Xers have, as with all previous generations, been influenced by their experiences growing up. Far fewer of them have had the familiarity of a stay-at-home mother, or even a two-parent household. Influences throughout their lives such as the Gulf War, poverty, AIDS and gangs, have caused them to have an uncertain outlook on their future. Consequently, this generation embraces more conservative values and, in general, expresses more caution about their future than their optimistic Boomer parents did at the same age. The circumstances of their upbringing have formulated a highly independent and entrepreneurial generation that - despite their attitudes - just want to have fun. Xers today are more likely to save their pennies to purchase a home and have the drive to start their own businesses, especially in the burgeoning technology industry.



Affordability

Despite their desire to purchase a home, obtaining the financial ability to do so is one of the biggest challenges first-time home buyers face. For this generation, more than any other previous generation, affordability is a key factor in the decision to purchase a home. The first homes for this group of buyers will reflect their basic needs and financial constraints more than their personal preferences for style and design. The number one desired amenity for this buyer group will be space allocated in appropriate places, with an overall focus on informality in a home. But whatever the style of home, the desires of these buyers will continue to influence the design of homes for the future.



Technology Centers

The personal computer, to this generation, has become as commonplace as the kitchen toaster. A room within a home for the PC is essential for their electronic taste buds. With the rapid development of computer software, it's not unfathomable to believe that the PC will eventually control home entertainment, television and security systems throughout the home. That's why a central office, media room or other dedicated computer space will be welcome, if not essential to this group of buyers.



Multi-ethnic Styles

The Generation X population consists of more African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and other ethnic populations than previous generations. While their preferences in clothing, music and entertainment are essentially the same, their homes will need to reflect the preferences of many different cultures.



Private Areas

An independent generation, many desire a place to retreat to. Often skeptical of the world around them, a place to get away to helps these first-time buyers foster their sense of emotional well-being and retool their resources when under stress.



Kitchens

While the kitchen will remain an important room to this buyer group, they will likely change the way kitchens are utilized - if not designed in the future. A generation raised on processed foods, many will be as likely to use the kitchen as an area to microwave convenience fares as they would otherwise labor over a home-cooked meal. It has been said that more condiments and side dishes will equip cabinets and refrigerators than traditional ingredients for meals. Therefore, more attention should be given to storage areas for snacks, desserts and beverages. But as first-time home buyers, their financial constraints will dictate that many of their desires, such as walk-in pantries, will be upgrades in the future, rather than necessities in their first home. For them, an efficient kitchen that is easy to work in will be the most important.



Common Areas

Perhaps a consequence of the limited time they spent with their parents, Xers and younger Boomers have come to form a close bond with their friends. These strong relationships will continue throughout their lives, which is why places to entertain and "hang out" will become essential to this group of buyers. This also means that formal rooms that are used once or twice a year will continue to decline in popularity. The design focus for this buyer group should be on the living areas of the home. Common areas that tie into the kitchen (for easy access to snacks), guest rooms and recreational game rooms are among the areas these buyers want. It is likely that many of these "common areas" will more definitively develop through time, but the most important consideration is that these areas are open, unrestricted living areas that welcome groups, whether family or friends. The individual needs and desires of today's first-time buyer are reflected in the designs specially selected for Seasons Of Life™- Designs For Spring's New Beginnings. The

exciting opportunities that lie ahead for them are reflective of natural springtime anticipation. The future awaits for today's first-time buyer, with their new home ready and waiting to help them experience it.