

Larger Luxury Homes Yield Huge Benefits

By Hilary S. Wolfson, Contributing Journalist

Armonk, NY – The evolution of a custom designed, luxury homes as we know them is changing quickly as the megabytes in your laptop. The proverbial cozy room with a view is being transformed into sun-filled amphitheater spaces where family-friendly wonders like jungle gyms, state-of-the-art Nautilus equipment and streamlines, high-tech office machinery are comfortably housed.

The family has definitely returned to the nest-albeit the nest is now 5,000 plus square-foot showplace with media rooms, multiple playrooms, grand foyer staircases, window seats, au-pair quarters, suites and closets galore. Home prices seem to be matching the square footage of these super luxury homes, according to the Westchester / Putnam County Board of Realtors and Houlihan / Lawrence, the area's largest real estate company. A record 305 properties sold for more than \$1 million each in 1999, with 62 selling in excess of \$2 million.

With space (and lots of it) subtly changing the way members of the family relate to one another, it's comforting to know that architects like Armonk-based Richard Kotz understand exactly what the mom, dad and kids of today (and the next century) need on terms of home design.

"Everyone wants their own space so maximizing living space is essential", says Mr. Kotz, who has been known to transform the simple wish list of his clients into palatial hilltop residences with bells and whistles aplenty. "Another important aspect of home design is the style of the home. People today are interested in having all the amenities that go along with a new home but they also want the house to have the quality, grandeur and old world charm characteristic of the past. What I do when I'm designing a home is incorporate the integrity and charm of the home of yesterday with the new, more modern qualities of today".

Mr. Kotz and other architect will tell you that home styles vary as much as the home buyer, where tastes run anywhere from the more formal, symmetrical brick or stone Georgian style to the more understated, asymmetrical Newport country or shingle farmhouse style reminiscent of home built at the turn of the century.

Whether the style is old or new, traditional or formal, homes designed by Mr. Kotz have attracted Westchester area buyers in a big way. Helen Felton, a licensed real estate agent with Houlihan Lawrence (Briarcliff), has worked closely with Mr. Kotz over the years, serving as listing broker for his "luxurious, spacious, family-friendly homes" in an elegant Pound Ridge (NY) subdivision called Rock Rim Ponds.

These mega-size, exquisitely appointed homes, built by Thomas McKenna (Thomas McKenna Construction Inc.), have everything and anything today's growing family could possibly want, says Ms. Felton, primarily because Mr. Kotz is very sensitive to the lifestyle of the "super-busy family who loves to entertain, relax and enjoy life at home.

"His designs and his vision reflect this sensitivity", says Ms. Felton. "Families today like homes with wonderful curb appeal, but they also want homes that suit their lifestyles. Many people today love to entertain at home, so the kitchens in Richard's home reflect this. Things like center islands, Viking stoves or Thermador ranges, granite-top counters, Sub Zero-style refrigerators-everything is state-of-the-art for the person who truly loves to entertain family and friends. Butler pantries are also popular today, which give people a second sink, dishwasher and more cabinet

space. Bathrooms are another thing people can't get enough of. Everyone today likes their own bathroom. Richard custom designs his homes with the family of today, and of the future, in mind".

With homes like these, privacy is a luxury that everyone in the family can afford. With square footage upwards of 6,000 plus, everyone can find their little corner of paradise to play in, work in, exercise in, or simply regroup in. With many families requesting an extra playroom or a home theater in the basement, children and teenagers can do their own entertaining in spaces specially design for them.

Bonus rooms also afford fabulous found space for the family who "likes to spread out and have a place to call their own", with rooms over the garage serving as ideal exercise rooms, additional playrooms or home office.

Let's not forget the ever useful garage of today which is no longer just "a garage". These 3 car, oversized spaces are a four-wheel driver's dream come true, with enough space to pull the family Suburban and Explorer in and out of the whole day long.

"The thing today in luxury homes is beauty, elegance, and above all, a wonderful use of space", emphasizes Ms. Felton. A "Richard Kotz" home incorporates all of these things, says Ms. Felton. "They are truly grand and spectacular but they are also homes that people can envision themselves living and settling into. They are home where comfort and beauty are woven naturally into the design".