

SUN NEW HOMES & CONDOS

Potential for innovation in new homes is endless



HUGH HERON
**ON-SITE
INSIGHT**

They say the only constant in life is change, and that's certainly true for the new home building industry.

Since I started in Canada as a builder in the late 1960s, new home design, construction and technology have evolved to accommodate the needs and wishes of our changing market demographics.

Gone are the days of cookie-cutter exteriors, walled off main-floor rooms and predetermined features and finishes. Today, homes have grand open spaces on the main floor, beautiful great rooms that bring families together for everything from homework and relaxing to entertaining, and builders offer tremendous choices when it comes to standard features and upgrades.

Homes are better built and more energy efficient than ever before. We have home automation, wiring that can handle home offices, media centres and electronics of all types. We even have apps that enable people to control systems such as lighting and heating from their smart phones.

It leaves me wondering where things will go from here. I read recently that in Vancouver, a developer is experimenting with selling fully furnished new homes, and I think that's a direction the industry may take in the future.

Here's why. When computers entered the scene decades ago, we thought they were going to free up all kinds of leisure time, when in fact, they have created a society of frantically busy peo-

ple who want everything now, now, now.

I can see new home shoppers wanting to purchase a house that is completed to the Nth degree to save them the time and effort of finding furniture and accessories.

I've also seen hints of another trend that involves bathrooms, which nowadays are more like spas. Occasionally people request bathrooms with no tubs, just showers.

Again, it's a result of families being busy, and a shower is simply quicker than a bath.

As glued to television, computer, laptop and phone screens as people are, they are also appreciative of opportunities to make the most of the outdoor spaces that are part of their homes.

I notice more outdoor kitchens and fireplaces being added to transform patios into true extensions of living space. Those who can afford the room may want courtyards with seating and water features as part of their designs.

Elaborate outdoor settings open the door to more "staycations" as families find the cost of traveling out of reach.

Of course, maintaining a yard and garden eats up time, so I believe we will also see more home buyers wanting hard landscaping that will eliminate lawn-mowing and weeding.

Our population continues to age, so anything that makes living easier is sure to appeal to empty-nesters and retirees. For example, main-floor master suites and laundry rooms are ideal. I have seen the occasional complex of four-storey town-homes that offer private elevators as upgrades.

Easy-to-operate door locks, non-slip flooring, wheelchair ramps and stair lifts, lever handles on interior doors rather than knobs, hands-free taps and other conveniences may become standards someday.

With the current focus on reducing our environmental footprint, I can see new home buyers wanting even more products made from renewable resources such as bamboo, and energy-saving elements such as solar-paneled roofs.

High-tech kitchen appliances complete with TV screens, meditation studios with piped-in nature sounds ... the possi-



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bilities are limited only by our imaginations.

Whatever happens as designs, electronics and technologies advance, remember that what truly turns a house into a home is people. On the whole, we enjoy a privileged life in Ontario, which is why each year, thousands of immigrants settle here, especially in the Greater Toronto Area. Home-ownership is the dream of many longtime and new Canadians, and I'm proud to be part of an industry that helps to make this

dream come true.

There's another saying that "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Let's hope the concept of "home" as a place of refuge with one's family continues for generations to come.

— **Hugh Heron is Principal and Partner in the Heron Group of Companies, President of Heathwood Homes, Chair of The Mikey Network and a Past President of the Ontario Home Builders' Association.**