



What's In, What's Out with Homebuyers in 2007

The majority of full-time real estate agents hear a lot of feedback every day all year from homebuyers as they visit potential resale and new construction homes. They wonder why builders, developers and home-sellers add finishes or upgrades that say "cheap" or "soon-to-be-out-of-date," in addition to owners who think the laminate wood-grained kitchen cabinets look good.

Old stand-bys like solid oak hardwood floors might not be on the design edge, but quality and durability out sell trendy any day in residential real estate. According to the New York Times, here's a list of home runs and strike-outs for those looking to sell to homebuyers in 2007.

What's In

- Smaller square footage homes. After years of sprawl, new construction buyers want less space with better finishes.
- Quality kitchen cabinets. With the kitchen/great room the center of family living, buyers today are looking at furniture style cabinets.
- Bamboo wood floors. It could over-take maple as the favorite light-colored wood flooring in 2007.
- Wall space for flat screen TV's. Specify power and cable boxes close to locations where homebuyers want to place the latest in visual technology. The popular location for installation in new construction is over the fireplace.
- Multiple and high-powered phone lines. With modems, DSL, wi-fi moving into mainstream use, tech-savvy homebuyers want "wired" homes.
- Separate shower stalls and bathtubs in master bathrooms. The growing divide among "soakers" and "showers" is increasing. Not having one of each in a master bath could squelch a purchase.
- Built-in home stereo systems are a must-have for many audiophiles. Wireless hasn't quite made the pre-wired audio system home obsolete, at least not in 2007.
- Balconies and decks wider than 3 feet. Homebuyers want usable outdoor space. Big enough for a bistro table and chairs and a couple of pots for container gardening.
- Guest parking. With the rise in condominiums, lofts and zero-lot line subdivisions, homebuyers want their guests to have a hassle-free experience when they arrive at their new home. Buy or lease an extra space for family or friends.
- Dog Parks. Dogs and homeownership go hand-in-hand. The new way to meet neighbors in the hood is to interact with them at the dog park. Before buying a home, check out the nearest one.
- Ranch or one level homes. The baby-boomers are discovering their utility in droves.
- Second Homes. The baby-boomers are also keeping this market segment strong. Demand for second homes was still on the upside in 2007, but if primary home demand weakens, the second home market will historically follow.

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- Seller give-backs. With a more balanced market in most metro markets, requests by buyers to pay closing costs have increased, and some sellers are paying them.
- Carbon Monoxide detectors. Home inspectors red flag homes that have only smoke detectors. Inexpensive and life-saving, install one on every floor of a home before opening to homebuyers.

What's Out

- The real estate bubble. It's a correction with a soft decline in prices.
- Ebony-stained hardwood floors. You're better off tearing it out than trying to sand the ebony out to refinish.
- Single-rod closets. Buyers want the most storage in the least amount of space. Organizers accomplish this.
- Dark rooms with small windows. Natural light can over-rule a lot of other problems in a home.
- Wallpaper. Buyers never have the same taste as decorators. Take it down (carefully) and paint.
- Builder grade light fixtures and interior fixtures used outside. The right fixtures say quality to buyers.
- Mid-century awnings on exterior windows and doors. Buyers want to let the sun shine in.
- Mirrored backsplashes in kitchens and everywhere else. Mirrored walls and ceilings say 1980's hedonism.
- Commitment (strong, bold trendy) colors. They look great in magazines, but as one buyer said "I don't live in a magazine."
- Gas grills that need their own tank. Buyers prefer the gas piped from the house so they don't have to replace tanks.
- Dropped ceilings. It might have updated a bungalow in the 1950's, but buyers want as much vertical space as possible.
- Flipping. Increasing inventories of unsold homes is increasing, signaling weakening demand by all buyers. If you are holding properties to flip, prepare to place them on market after the holidays.

On the Way Out

- Stainless steel appliances. Word-of-mouth says the cleaning requirements aren't for everyone.
- Laminate flooring that looks like hardwood. Not only can buyers tell it's not wood, the noise it makes with high-heel shoes is the deal killer during property showings.

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