

Thinking of building a new home or expanding your current one? These hot new home trends may be just the ticket!



Exotic and eco-friendly flooring: Bamboo, cork and eucalyptus flooring products are both beautiful and easy on the environment. All are sustainable alternatives to traditional hardwoods, maturing in

roughly half the time that it takes hardwoods to grow. In addition, they're durable and affordable. More exotic choices, such as Brazilian Cherry and recaptured wood flooring from mills and other sources, are also increasingly popular, adding beauty and character to any living space.

Dual master bedroom retreats: According to the 2000 Census, nearly four million American homes have three or more generations living together. Whether it's baby boomers caring for aging parents, empty nesters whose grown children have come back to roost, or young families living with their parents to pool finances, the demand for dual master bedrooms and in-law suites is on the rise.

A growing number of new homes are being built with a guest bedroom and full bath on the main floor. And demand for

a true second master bedroom is climbing. Dual masters not only appeal to multi-generational homes, but to owners who want an upstairs retreat now, with



the option of moving downstairs as they age. True in-law suites, with living area and kitchenette in addition to bedroom, are also a hot commodity in the local market, whether for visiting family or rental. Masters with sitting rooms en-suite are increasingly popular, too. Once seen as a luxury item, the master bedroom sitting room adds to the sense of retreat, enabling owners to further cocoon in their homes.

Kitchens, Stone and Concrete: The Kitchen continues to be a primary focus for new home buyers. No longer just spacious

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and utilitarian, the Kitchen is "control central" for the home, and buyers are increasingly demanding greater amenities and flexibility, whether for cooking or entertaining. Double ovens, warming drawers, wine refrigerators and new refrigerator drawers make cooking a breeze. The latter, offered by Sub-Zero and others, provides drawers set below the countertop that can be placed strategically around the kitchen. Both beautiful and practical, the drawers allow designers unlimited flexibility in planning that dream kitchen.

The kitchen counter is also undergoing a renaissance. Buyers are branching out from solid surface and granite to include engineered stone, concrete and more. Engineered stone is made from quartz crystal and polymer resin, and is nearly maintenance free. On par with or slightly cheaper than granite, it's heat and cold resistant,



and is designed not to stain or scratch. The product is also versatile: it comes in a variety of colors and can be formed into an array of shapes and patterns. Concrete adds cool styling to today's kitchen. Poured in place and very heavy, it can be shaped in limitless ways. Concrete does stain, however, and requiring sealing every six months. Also on the rise: mixing and matching counters. Buyers are utilizing concrete, stainless steel, marble, or wood to complement and enhance solid surface and granite work spaces.

Drop Zones: What's a new home without a "mud" room or other drop zone for everyone to stash their stuff on the way in the house? Once just a few hooks or shelves in the laundry room, today's drop zones are often rooms to themselves, complete with benches, cubbies, backpack and coat hooks, and more. Many offer white boards to keep track of the family's busy event schedule. Others include inclined shoe storage, lockers and built-in chests.

The Vanishing Living Room: Another growing design trend is the elimination of the formal living room. Many new homes either forgo it completely, or build a more flexible space that can be used for office or music room. In fact, with so many buyers working from home, having a home office has largely overtaken the priority for a formal living room. Also increasingly popular are "office nooks" located off the kitchen, ideal for managing mail, paying bills and keeping up with the business of running a busy household.

Bringing the Outdoors In: Larger screened porches, dramatic outdoor hearths, stonework patios and more are fueling the trend toward expanded outdoor living spaces. With buyers' growing desire to embrace natural surroundings and imbibe the beauty of the outdoors, today's new home exteriors offer greater and more opulent amenities, with deck, porch, and patio sizes that rival some home interiors for space and elegance. Technology is also making its way outdoors, with stereo sound, cable and phone connections a part of the outdoor infrastructure.

Other hot trends: And the list goes on! Two other hot home trends that deserve mention are the movements to build green, and to "age in place". Each merits its own column and will be highlighted in an upcoming issue. Until then, here's to your house!