

# Home Building Trends of 2006

by Lindsey Oostra



**T**oday's newly built homes are much larger and more packed with amenities than homes 30 years ago, states the U.S. Census Department based on new-home data collections from June 2006. Local homebuilders have noticed this trend as well, though they are quick to point out that Midwestern homes tend to be a bit more modest.

"We're still fairly conservative here, fairly practical," says Tom Graf, co-owner of John Andrew Builders in Appleton. While the average floor area of new homes continued to rise through 2005, the Midwest remained more than 100 square feet below the 2,434-square foot average, the Census Department reports. Graf says 1,700 to 2,400 square feet is average in most Fox Valley homes he builds.

Kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms and garages have seen the most expansion over the years, experts say. Homes today also utilize more multipurpose rooms, open floor plans and expanded accessibility, convenience and ease of use. Since people are spending more time in their homes, they want only the best in quality and style.

## INCREASED EASE OF USE

"We're seeing a lot more maintenance-free products," says Carol Ladish, vice president of Ladish Homes in Appleton. "People want less work so it's easier to just enjoy their homes. They don't want to spend one of their few beautiful days off painting the garage trim."

Maintenance-free or easy-to-maintain materials like home siding, materials for decks and other manmade products are on the rise. Graf says, "I'm seeing more and more people ripping their wood decks out and putting in stone or concrete patios. A deck is nice, but it's high maintenance – staining it every year or every other year at least. Then the wood warps and cracks and splits. And it doesn't last long – only 10 to 15 years."

As a solution, Graf sees many residents choosing manmade products with longer lifespans. "We did one deck that was made with glue and sawdust. From far away you don't even realize it's not wood," he says. Though the costs associated with manmade products are still quite high, Graf says, "People will see that if you spend more on the

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REMODELING & Decorating



**This home built by Ladish Homes in Neenah features an open floor plan, which is extremely popular today. An open floor plan allows homeowners to easily see into surrounding rooms.**

**This craftsman-style home was also built by Ladish Homes in Neenah. The craftsman style has been growing in popularity with homebuilders, as have maintenance-free products, such as vinyl shake, which is used on this residence.**

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deck initially, you won't have to spend time every year redoing it."

Maintenance-free siding is another area that's seen a lot of growth. While brick and wood exteriors used to reign supreme, stucco and vinyl siding have taken over the industry because little upkeep is required, the Census Department reports. Products resembling wood and other natural materials are quite popular in this area, though prices remain high.

### PRACTICAL DECORATING

Decorative or stamped concrete has been one of the bigger crazes this year, say both Ladish and Lisa Arthur Huben, marketing director and office manager of Custom Kreations in Seymour. Ladish says, "Earthy tones like lighter rust, orange, brown or anything that complements the tone of the house is common." Concrete can be stamped to resemble brick, granite, cobblestone, tile and many other designs.

As far as the interior goes, Arthur Huben says, "Bold colors are in big time." Colors like red, green, blue and gold are hits in the Fox Valley, while nationally warm earth tones like grainy yellow, tropical violet, burnt henna and deep apricot are popular.

However, Graf warns homeowners to stick to basic colors they won't get sick of and avoid ones that might quickly go out of style. "If you walk into a house and the bathtub is aqua blue, you know right when it was built, and that really dates the time period," he says. "Your white toilet and white sink might look boring and really plain, but you can decorate around that. Then you can sell the house, and the next person can do a whole different color."

Homeowners also have a newfound focus on simplicity and openness. The ever-popular open floor plan makes each room of a home flow together with less walls and a more spacious feel.

Graf says, "In many of the houses we build, the living room flows into the eating area, which flows into the kitchen. While you're standing at the kitchen sink, you can see what's going on." Parents find this especially helpful to keep a watchful eye on their children in the other room.

With increased attention on convenience and accessibility, rooms are taking

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Custom Kreations in Seymour recently finished extensively remodeling this cabin located on Legend Lake in Shawano. The kitchen features handmade wood cabinets and laminate countertops.



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on many different functions, giving way to a multipurpose nature, local builders say.

Graf says, "If you have a dining room, maybe put some French doors on it, so you can use it as an office, or you can build some nice bookshelves and use it as a library." Other rooms, too, can serve dual purposes. Convert a dormant guest room into a home office, or create a quick dining option by eating around the island in the kitchen.

### GOING THAT EXTRA MILE

"It's getting really expensive to go out these days, so more and more people are staying in and entertaining at home," Arthur Huben says. "Entertainment systems are becoming very popular with items like theater rooms, large-screen TVs and surround sound throughout the whole house."

But entertainment and theater rooms are just the beginning. Newly built homes focus on individual needs and desires, catering to a person's every whim. More expensive homes include specialized rooms like a wine cellar, personal beauty salon, meditation room, library or ballet studio. Though Midwestern homes may not include these features, they are common on a national level.

More common in this area are bonus rooms, local builders say. Graf says, "Usually above the garage, instead of having that open space, you can make that into a playroom, a storage room or a closet to the master bedroom."

### SPACE TO ROAM

Within today's large homes, local builders have seen the most growth in high-traffic areas of the home, including the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and garage.

The kitchen has always been the center of the house, and today's homeowners are keeping with this tradition. While Graf says the trend for kitchen islands may be dying, built-in space for appliances, including the microwave, is a top seller. Ladish says this is popular even in the most modest of homes.

Custom Kreations has seen a growing number of "larger kitchens with more storage and a lot of work area," Arthur Huben says. This fits with the push for convenience and accessibility throughout the home. Graf says, "I think people are looking for a func-

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tional kitchen that's large enough for all their dishes and appliances, but looks pretty, too." In addition, Graf says homeowners like pullout wastebaskets and rollout shelves for storing pots and pans.

Bathrooms, too, are becoming more like private getaways, especially the master bath, Arthur Huben says. "In the master bath, we are finding people wanting tile, walk-in showers with dual heads, dual sinks and vanities, two-person soaking whirlpools and a toilet in a separate area with a door," she says.

While the majority of homes 30 years ago used to have one and a half bathrooms, times have changed. Today, two to two and a half baths is most common, Graf says. "Even most ranch houses have a master bath, a family bath and a half bath," he says.

While bathroom trends have changed over the years, bedroom trends have not. Three-bedroom homes were common 30 years ago and remain so today, though four-bedroom homes have steadily risen in popularity.

While garages have always been a must-have, anything that held more than two cars was considered rare. Today, however, three-car garages are the norm. "We're seeing more people now who want at least a three-stall garage," Graf says. "We've only built one contract house with a two-stall garage."

Ladish says, "I think if many cities would allow garages to be bigger, they would be. People definitely think the more space, the better." Inside these garages, Ladish has seen increased storage potential and quite a few garage organizers, she says.

While convenience is a must-have today, only time will tell what 2007 has in store for homebuilding trends. ♦



(Top) John Andrew Builders of Appleton completed this house for the summer 2005 Parade of Homes.

Tom Heegeman and Tom Graf, co-owners of John Andrew Builders, stand in front of the home before completion.



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