

The wish list

With a wealth of buying and finishing options to choose from, which ones are home buyers opting for? **SHEILA BRADY** asks the experts.



WILLIAM P. MCELLIGOTT PHOTO

Large windows in this Manotick home add lots of natural light and let homeowners connect with the outdoors while larger islands, top, add versatility in kitchens.

Buying a house used to be easy because builders didn't offer options. You talked to your banker and signed on the dotted line.

Now, house shopping is like finding a magical bathing suit — the one that makes your waist look smaller, legs longer and chest parts voluptuous.

We consulted an expert panel of architects, builders and designers to sort through the racks of housing options and come up with a short list of what will please your banker, save the environment, impress the guests, coddle the chef and make room for the children and their computers.

SINGLE, TOWN OR CONDO

The single-family home used to be king (or queen) in Ottawa's housing market, but that was before rising land costs pushed prices out of reach for many buyers. The average new single in Ottawa costs \$485,000 and that's before factoring in upgrades. The single now represents 35 per cent

of sales, condos range between 20 and 25 per cent and the ever-evolving townhome captures the rest, says Shawn Bellman, director of marketing for Richcraft Homes. Townhomes are getting bigger and more sophisticated, appealing to first-time buyers, grandparents and folks who don't want to cut a lot of grass.

THE BIG ON SMALL

Buyers are putting big homes on tiny lots to curb rising prices, says Bellman. A 44-foot lot is the new 50-foot lot, with 35-foot lots representing more than 50 per cent of Richcraft's single-family home sales. Richcraft will soon join builders such as Holitzner, Minto and Mattamy, who are already building single homes on 30- and 31-foot lots.

You can fit a 2,680-square-foot house on a 35-foot lot and a 2,100-square-foot house on a 31-foot lot, says Bellman. And every builder in town has a home over 3,000 square feet on a 38- or 40-foot lot in their portfolio, adds veteran housing specialist Ron Desjardins.

CONDOS AND SPACE

Condos have shrunk in the past six years as builders try to keep prices within reason, says David Chick, executive vice-president of Domicile Developments, which recently released the Kavanaugh, a 132-unit building on Beechwood Avenue. In the past year, Ottawa's average condo has shrunk by about 100 feet to 830 square feet. There are also condos well under 600 square feet designed for first-time, younger buyers. However, older buyers want more space, says Chick, adding several buyers combined two units at the Kavanaugh to end up with more than 2,400 square feet of space.

Condo buyers want generous master bedrooms, big enough to handle a king-sized bed, says Chick. Ten-foot by 10-foot bedrooms just don't do it for these buyers, who also want a generous walk-in closet that can be customized to hold their stuff.



JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

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Spa-inspired bathrooms are also going green.