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## Priciest homes are built for functionality, not size

By DEBBIE WALTZER

When planning construction of a high-end home—according to architects, builders and home owners—size does not matter. Functionality does.

True, Monroe and Ontario counties are filled with numerous new palatial residences, ranging in square footage from 7,500 up to 12,000. But intelligent use of that space is what really counts.

So say Linda and Peter Capicotto, who decided a few years ago that their 2,600-square-foot Penfield home with one upstairs bathroom simply was not big enough to accommodate their growing family.

With four children and one more on the way, the couple—she, a former respiratory therapist, now a homemaker, and he, an orthopedic surgeon with Greater Rochester Orthopaedics—contacted architect Patrick Morabito as well as homebuilders Daniel Catone and Shane Olney of Danrich Homes to help them plan a permanent homestead.

A pleasing appearance for their future Webster home was important, notes Linda Capicotto, who pored through decorating magazines and house plans for ideas. But ample, logical space for the family's growing brood was more so.

Thanks to ample discussions with Morabito during the design phase, the Capicottos got exactly what they wanted.

They selected a lot on Wild Mallard Trail in Webster, still in the same district so that their children—now ages 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11—could continue to attend parochial school at St. Rita's Church in Penfield.

And while the home is large and pristine—7,500 square feet with six bedrooms and six and a half bathrooms—it is also user friendly for a young family whose activities range from skiing and gymnastics to hockey and swimming.

Elegance is present alongside practicality throughout the brick-and-stone-covered home.

The kitchen—"where we live," Capicotto says—is spacious and decorated in a French provincial style. Its features include granite countertops, a built-in refrigerator, a commercial-style stove with six burners and a griddle, and a breakfast bar with plenty of stools for all of the children.



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

"A sense of home is about family, rather than a place," says Marie Kenton, president of Ketmar Development Corp.

But perhaps Capicotto's favorite amenity is found just adjacent to the kitchen. Recalling with a tremble the mounds of clutter that used to fill their former home's mudroom—from backpacks and boots to school projects and hockey sticks—this ingenious mom asked Morabito to design a personal locker area for each of her children.

As soon as they hop off the school bus in the afternoon, the kids head to their own spacious and unobtrusive lockers, covered with the same material as the kitchen cabinets. A visitor would never know about the cacophony of items contained within.

Family friendliness abounds elsewhere throughout the house, too. Each child's bedroom is decorated to reflect his or her

personal interests, and hallways feature low-to-the-ground nightlights for any child who wants to come in and give mom and dad an extra kiss during the night.

Comfortable family-room areas are found on both the first floor and in the finished basement, but two additional features underscore the couple's commitment to making the house a haven for their children.

On the second floor, in a wide expansive hallway outside the kids' bedrooms, sits a 15-foot-long, three-desk child's study area, complete with connecting desks, chairs, stocked bookshelves and networking capabilities. Already, the older children use this space—as well as the kitchen breakfast bar—to complete their home-

work at this in-house kid-sized library.

But perhaps the most fun and functional part of the house—at least in the eyes of the hockey-playing family members—is found in an unfinished section of the basement. Knowing the children's passion for hockey, builder Shane Olney installed durable plywood from floor to ceiling on the walls of a large section of the basement. With the addition of movable nets, the area has been transformed into a mini-rink where no structural damage can be done, thanks to the protective coating on the walls.

Both the Capicottos and builder Daniel Catone—who builds roughly eight deluxe homes yearly, ranging in price from \$250,000 to \$2.5 million—feel a true sense of pride about their joint project at 613 Wild Mallard Trail.

“It was a pleasure to build this house because the owners were easy to work with and excellent decision makers,” Catone says. “A successful homebuilding experience involves a partnership between the architect, builder and owner. I have a feeling of ownership about this house, in large part due to the easygoing members of this team.”

Such a partnership is something that general contractor Marie Kenton enjoys as well. As president of Ketmar Development Corp., the Realtor and real estate developer—who runs the company with her British husband, Charles, a carpenter by trade who formerly served as a set technician for the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and came to Rochester in the '70s to help launch Geva—grows very close to her clients as they jointly plan the family's dream house.

“We build custom houses of all styles,” says Marie Kenton, surrounded in her office by volumes of books on architecture and design. “We want to get inside our clients' heads, understand exactly what they are looking for, then conceptualize a vision.”

Since launching the company in 1988, Kenton and her teammates have built numerous customized homes for their clients in Monroe, Ontario and Wayne counties.

While the company over the years has built several large homes—ranging in size from 2,500 to 12,000 square feet and costing \$300,000 to \$5 million—Kenton is now heavily influenced by architect and author Sarah Susanka, who turned the high-end market on its ear when she published her first book, “The Not So Big House,” in 1998.

“True, many clients are still looking for humungous houses, but I'm on a campaign—like Susanka—to make houses smaller,” says Kenton, whose company has produced two Symphony Showhouses in Malvern Hills to benefit the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

“My goal is to try to help educate clients and to point out that, regardless of a home's total square footage, it is best to minimize hallway space and to maximize actual room



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

“A successful homebuilding experience involves a partnership between the architect, builder and owner,” says homebuilder Daniel Catone of Danrich Homes.

space,” she says. “A house needn't be bigger to be better. Rather, a successful home is usually one with flexible space that can be adapted as the occupants' needs change.”

As members of the Builder 20 Club—an offshoot group of the National Association of Home Builders, which examines high-end housing trends around the country—the Kentons have observed numerous emerging preferences.

“The kitchen still remains the centerpiece of new home construction,” Kenton says. “That one room is the hub of the home. Since 9/11, people are doing more in-home entertaining than ever, and you'll never get guests out of the kitchen. It represents a return to the home base.”

Equally important—both in local homes and across the country—is an adjoining hearth or keeping room, a place that often features sofas, loveseats, fireplaces and workstations, where family members can stay connected with one another.

Other national trends, according to Kenton? More bathrooms, usually one per bedroom; tucked-away staircases; elegant wine cellars; private offices; sunrooms or conservatories; screened-in porches; and sensible traffic patterns throughout the home.

“People are looking for a safe haven in their homes,” she says. “A sense of home is about family, rather than a place.”

Fellow Rochester homebuilder Dominick Caroselli agrees. As owner of Cambridge Park Development for the past 18 years, Caroselli builds homes ranging from \$500,000 to \$2 million in Webster, Pittsford, Victor and Canandaigua and says

that his firm “puts an emphasis on architectural authenticity.”

Thus, when an area family wanted a new home with Prairie-style architecture, he and his design/construction team took four separate trips around the country to view homes built by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright for inspiration.

And like Kenton, Caroselli says that square footage is not the most important factor in a home.

“The size of a home doesn't drive the overall project; rather, the lifestyle of the inhabitants is what counts,” he notes.

Locally and across the country, kitchens and baths are the most influential rooms, Caroselli maintains.

“You'll never go wrong if you feature kitchens and baths because that's what sells,” he says. “Increasingly, homeowners are opting for granite over Formica, slate over ceramic.”

Location, too, plays a role for homeowners, who often purchase a house in a desired neighborhood, tear it down and build from scratch. Area residents particularly prefer proximity to a golf course or to water.

Michael Medick, a Baltimore-based architect and former chairman of the American Institute of Architects' housing committee, says this is a nationwide trend.

“People are looking for ideal locations, and they are getting away from so-called ‘McMansions,’ popular a decade ago, which featured two-story entry foyers,” he says. “Now, high-end homeowners are looking for customization and individualization, with practical use of space. In-

stead of wanting a big, splashy front entrance that screams 'I've arrived,' clients are putting that space into functional family rooms. We are most certainly seeing a movement back to tasteful design and in-

telligent use of space."

Caroselli, who has designed and built some New England-style homes on Canandaigua Lake, notes the same trend.

"Homes represent individual expres-

sion," he says. "What is important to you as a homeowner comes through loud and clear by your choices."

*Debbie Waltzer is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*