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# What's Trending in New Construction Home Features and Amenities

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With new construction offering a great alternative for buyers closed out of a tight inventory market, you can raise your value as their agent by recommending home features that return the greatest ROI.

New construction has been gaining rapid popularity among buyers as homes for sale grow increasingly scarce. But with so many amenities and finish options to choose from, how do you know which features will return the most value for the money? Recently, we spoke to homebuilding experts to get their input on how buyers can get the most bang for the buck. Here's their top 10 list of trending, high-ROI new home features.

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# Top 10 New Construction Home Features

There are many reasons why more buyers are opting for new construction. For one, new construction gives frustrated homeowners an alternative source after being bid out of so many homes in a tight inventory market. Two, they can build to their own specifications and, three, a brand new house offers buyers peace of mind that their materials and appliances will be up to code, energy efficient and free of the lingering wear-and-tear of previous owners.

Yet, while the show model you toured with your clients may have them dazzled with the gleaming hardwood floors, granite countertops and oversized master bath, plenty of hidden costs may be lurking behind that sparkling new backsplash and landscaped yard.

The best bet? Ask the builder upfront what is covered. Some builders try to include as much as possible in their new construction homes to limit upgrades, while others may charge extra — with the difference in upgrades from base to show models numbering in the tens of thousands of dollars. Next, coach clients to concentrate on structural upgrades that plan for the future and identify key features that will pay off with the highest resale value. Here's the top 10 list of new construction home features for 2021:

## Splurge on Kitchen Cabinets

They're the focal point of the kitchen — the hub of the home — and a top feature that almost always pays a handsome return on its investment, according to the National Association of REALTORS®' Houselogic.com. Higher-end cabinets like floor-to-ceiling designs with premium hardware, soft closes and drawer slides will deliver tall returns on the buyer's investment. Not only do these models open up storage space, but they're likely to catch the eye of future buyers.

Lindsay Haltom, Marketing Director for Homes by Taber, Oklahoma, has definitely seen a trend toward more floor-to-ceiling cabinets for the extra storage space.

"People are looking for ample counter space, large pantries, oversized kitchen islands for extra prep space and cabinets underneath to provide additional storage for all of those new trending appliances and gadgets, such as air fryers and pressure cookers," she says.

She has also seen more homeowners opting for white cabinets as the primary color in the kitchen, then adding pops of navy blue, shades of green or even a trendy light pink for a retro feel to the island or lower cabinets.

"Homeowners can feel overcommitted when it comes to too much color in the space. White cabinets, with the added pop of color on the island, creates a fun focal point without overpowering the space. We find that while customers love the bold colors they see when surfing Pinterest, when it

comes to their home, they don't see themselves living with those choices long term, which make white cabinets the overall top trending choice," says Haltom.

Ben Rutt, VP, Marketing for **Keystone Custom Homes** in Pennsylvania and northern Maryland, has also seen white shaker-style cabinets as "by far the most asked for and popular feature in kitchens."

"Taking modern farmhouse-inspired features with crisp white, clean lines and modern styling and adding in a layer of natural elements really brings that modern styling down to earth to create a homey feel," he says.

## Bring the Kitchen Outdoors

One big trend brought on by the pandemic is the rise in popularity of outdoor kitchens. According to NAR's Remodeling Impact Report, outdoor kitchens are fetching a 71% ROI. The movement began in 2020 with many homeowners looking for new ways to safely eat and converse in their home spaces. Once winter hit, the fire pits and patio heaters moved in. Today, these dining oases range from the simple grill and patio to a fully equipped cooking station with stove top, counters, appliances, fire pits, custom patios and decks for entertaining.

"Outdoor patios provide additional living space that's separate from typical living space," says Haltom. "Before, these spaces may have consisted of a smaller, covered patio. Now, homes are coming with extended, covered patio spaces with outdoor wood-burning fireplaces where people are adding full sets of furniture, allowing them to fully utilize the space year-round. We've welcomed many new families coming from New York and California who've always dreamed of having an outdoor living space after apartment living."

For city properties where front or back yard space may not be as abundant, Kimberly Mackey, founder of **New Homes Solutions Consulting**, Tampa, FL, has found the pandemic has led to more people cooking at home, gardening and even "porch gardening" with herbs and plants in small spaces to give the feel of "outdoor living even where there's not a lot of land."



## Open the Garage

National new home builder K. Hovnanian<sup>®</sup> Homes recommends extending the size of the garage — a smart move for buyers who could use a little extra space for storing larger vehicles and seasonal items. Buyers might also consider heating the square footage and converting it into extra living space.

According to a Hanley Wood 2020 report, a garage door replacement ranked second in the top 10 cost-to-value remodeling projects, retrieving over 94% cost recoup.

"Garage doors are one of those details that you may not think about," says Haltom, "but insulated garage doors are really craved. It creates more of an energy efficient home and cuts down on noise."

Mackey is seeing large garages big enough to house RVs, snowmobiles and toy haulers trending in the northern states, such as outside Minneapolis where one builder framed a two-story garage for an RV alongside a one-story "rambler-style" house. With more RVs hitting the road in the wake of the pandemic, this trend is only likely to gain traction.





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## Lighten the Mood

As with structural choices, lighting should be carefully considered upfront since any changes post-close can entail a messy expense. The kitchen and master bath are great rooms to add both bright and subtle upgrades, like recessed lighting, pendants and sconces.

"Especially with kitchen pendants, more people are picking bold options to create that wow factor when you walk into the living space. More new construction homeowners are going for gold or brass lighting options and then matching their faucets and hardware," says Haltom.

Others are embracing the modern farmhouse feel, choosing vintage-like Edison bulbs but in LED versions to save energy and extend the life of the bulbs, says Rutt.



### Master the Bath

The bath is an easy place for buyers to get soaked into paying too much for amenities that they might not want or need in the future. Agents can help clients weigh the value of luxury amenities like a walk-in with multiple body jets against the price of a custom install. Perhaps radiant heated floors will add just the right touch of practical luxury in colder climates without the pricey accoutrements.

Keystone's Rutt sees more emphasis on large, walk-in showers and less on the tub as the focal point of the bathroom. "In the Nineties, we saw homes with huge soaking tubs and a small standup shower," he says. "Now, our most popular bath has a large walk-in tiled shower and a freestanding tub, which is still present and beautiful but less about the size."

According to Haltom, many homeowners are opting for floorplans that connect the laundry room to the primary suite within a space adjacent to the master bath and closet. This layout feature avoids homeowners from having to drag their dirty clothes from the bedroom throughout the house to the laundry room.

"The majority of our plans have that functionality," says Haltom. "We did it on one and now all of our customers expect this."

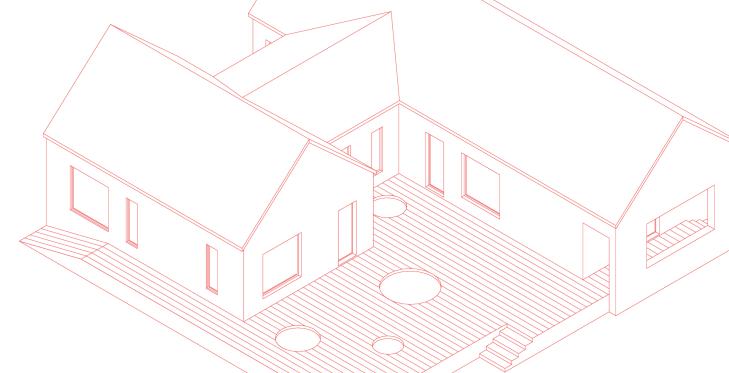


## Go Big on Floors for First Impressions

A great wood floor can warm up a room and create a great first impression for future buyers. For durability and long-term wear, buyers are going with ceramic tile or wood-look laminates in the kitchen and opting for offset larger tiles in the bath.

Haltom says more people are replacing carpet with wood-look ceramic and porcelain tiles in the bedroom and living room and installing patterned tiles in half baths and laundry rooms to add that pop of interest to these smaller spaces.

There's also "a huge trend" toward engineered vinyl plank (EVP) versus hardwood, adds Rutt. EVP offers the look and feel of real wood versus vinyl products of the past yet offers a kid- and dog-friendly product that's waterproof, scratch resistant and visually beautiful for a lower price point.





### Widen the Resale Window

Windows of a house not only provide light — they also silence noise, protect against harmful UV rays and create a seamless silhouette. Particularly in extreme weather locations, windows can make a great investment, if nothing else, for the money they'll pay back to the homeowners for years in energy savings, retaining heat in the winter and cool air in the summer.

Because they can be expensive to change, new construction homeowners should invest in quality energy efficient windows upfront in the homebuilding process.

Keep in mind that, along with energy efficient home features that make the home more air-tight, homeowners may want to consider adding a good air-filtration system to purge unwanted odors from cooking, pets and germs. For instance, Homes by Taber added separate systems with MERV 13 filters to their units, which filter bacteria, viruses and microscopic dust particles while circulating fresh air through the air filtration system, says Haltom.



### Max the Flex Space

While the open concept space was big pre-pandemic, work from home and stay-at-home orders have closed the door on that trend, with a few exceptions. Delineated space with strong wifi is not only a want — it's a need for the busy household who's on back-to-back calls for work and school.

Today, many existing homeowners are installing room dividers to lend privacy, and new homebuyers are looking for dedicated study spaces in their new construction blueprints, especially now that there are more multigenerational families living under one roof, says Mackey.

A big topic in the builder community, multigenerational living is driving more builders to accommodate a master suite for the parents and then a separate upstairs living area for the adult children. "There are still common areas, like the kitchen and living spaces, but there are also dedicated spaces for parents, who are working from home, and the kids, who need dedicated spaces to do homework," says Rutt.

Also trending are pocket offices and small cozy nooks for exercise, reading, meditation and work, says Mackey. She points to Pinterest where more dedicated office space and closet and office combinations are surfacing on designers' pages.



### Kid-Friendly Features

According to Zillow, homes with **kid-friendly features**, such as finished basements and dedicated bonus spaces, and properties with nearby parks, playrooms and pools are hot tickets today. Listings with the words "treehouse" or "garage" are associated with a 2.2% sales premium, and homes including a backyard in the description are selling more than five days faster. Other home features contributing to a faster sale include sandboxes (4.5x faster) and playgrounds (2.5x faster).

Likewise, any listings indicating nearby parks, cul de sacs and community pools, especially those in walkable distance, are selling between two and four days faster than expected, according to Zillow.

In colder regions, indoor tennis and basketball courts are catching the eye of new construction buyers who are planning to turn their homes into year-round retreats for their families.

And in South Florida, Mackey is seeing more custom playgrounds with zip lines, climbing walls and over-the-top treehouses. Looking for a pool on an existing property in the Sunshine State? Prepare for a brutal bidding war and "don't even think about lowballing," says Marianne Fearon, a Jacksonville-based agent with BHHS Florida Network Realty. "Pool homes are gone in less than 24 hours."

Inside new construction, one hot kid-friendly feature that's taken off for Keystone Homes is the walk-in closet converted into a kid's playhouse featuring a reading niche. "This was featured in some of our model homes, and now customers are special-requesting it," says Rutt.

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## Create a Great First Impression

Last but certainly not least, new construction homeowners who want to heighten interest for future resale definitely will not want to scrimp on curb appeal. Within the first nine seconds of entering a home, a potential buyer forms the first impression. Consider what a guest will see right from the curb and when they walk through the front door.

Rutt recommends homeowners invest in a great front door to make a statement. Also, consider the experience of the family members when they enter the home through the garage. What does it look like? Is it functional?

While the new construction process can be intimidating for new homeowners, real estate agents can greatly help their buying clients make the best decisions by advising them on the latest trending home features that will deliver the most ROI over the long term. Because not all builders offer the aforementioned amenities, it's especially important for agents to understand their buyers' needs and price points to better guide the selection process.

Click here for more tips on how to work with builders and to receive a FREE download with a 15-Point New Construction Client Checklist.