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NATIONALS 2011

Recession-Defying

**MODEL
HOMES**



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By Jan Mitchell

The Nationals 2011

RECESSION-DEFYING **MODEL HOMES**

This year's "Nationals" model home winners are all about second acts and amazing transformations. From new owners to revamped merchandising strategies, from difficult home sites to tough markets, these model homes prove that in a down market, successes still shine through.

The addition of brick wall veneers at Belvedere lends a loft feeling to this urban home.





A minimalistic style helps maximize the diminutive square footage in the Daybreak model at Caldwell.

PHOTOS BY MAGGIE HOLMES



BEST INTERIOR MERCHANDISING
OF A HOME PRICED LESS
THAN \$300,000

Daybreak at Caldwell

FIRST ACT: In an initial attempt to woo buyers, only the front rooms of the model homes were furnished.

SECOND ACT: With sales not as overwhelming as expected, a new strategy was adopted, including fully merchandising the model. That's when the Nationals award-winning designs in the Caldwell model were born.

THE STORY: Daybreak is a new-home suburban community in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah, developed by Kennecott Land and incorporating 12 builders. The Caldwell model is one home in a triplex "mansion," which together resemble one grand detached home with an urban feel.

Tailor-made for an empty-nester couple or single professional, the two master bedrooms in the Caldwell—one up and one down—promise the possibility of a live-in parent, privacy for guests, or a roommate to share costs.

"The trend we are seeing throughout the West Coast is cleaner, simpler lines, transitional or 'current,' we like to call it an urban look even in a suburban setting," says Jaimi Julian Thompson, president of Artisan Design Group. Tonal color and rich textures, a quartz "fly-over bar top" in the kitchen, and a stunning master bath were hallmarks of the Caldwell model. The minimalistic style helped the 1675 square feet appear plenty spacious. One of the model's most memorable hooks was the unique custom decorative drywall treatment in the dining room.

"This model captured simultaneously the drama of a clean-lined contemporary look in a suburban setting, while main-

taining an affordable, attainable design," explains Thompson. The price point was around \$233,000. Seventy to 80 percent of buyers have opted to replicate the finishes, colors, and upgrades in the model, the highest percentage Thompson has ever witnessed.

Thompson adds that the builder, Holmes Homes, is so innovative and forward thinking that they offer home automation standard in every home, even throwing in an iPad to run it all. "They are always asking themselves, 'What can we do to make buyers happier, to stand out, to gain attention at model release,'" she says.

In a season of famous builder failures, Holmes experienced brisk sales here during the summer of 2010, enjoying perhaps the best November and December yet, reports Thompson. "Models are very useful for buyers being able to utilize the lifestyle they want," she concludes. "These models were very compelling." •

BEST INTERIOR MERCHANDISING
OF A HOME PRICED BETWEEN
\$300,000 AND \$500,000

Belvedere

FIRST ACT: Forty-three acres in the Irvine Business Complex.

SECOND ACT: The first urban master-planned community in Orange County, developed by Lennar Homes.

THE STORY: Central Park West consists of five distinct neighborhoods to appeal to specific buyer niches. The Belvedere is a four-story mid-rise consisting of sophisticated one- and two-bedroom flats, plus a den/bonus room. The buyer profile is young professionals.

This plan's main merchandising challenge was to craft separate zones and create privacy in a space with only two and one-half walls and a cumbersome column in the center.

Merchandiser Chameleon Design solved this with a sheer metallic fabric on a curved track. When open, kitchen inhabitants can share the TV with lounge dwellers. When closed, the fictional resident—a male musician—can enjoy private practice time. A curved sectional mirrored the curve of the curtain.

The model was brought to life with vibrant colors, and guitars were artfully placed in the lounge area. Brick veneers on the walls created a loft look. The overall effect was young, hip, and urban.

Ranging from 1270 to 2025 square feet, the price is right for young urbanites as well—beginning from the low 400,000's. •

The model was brought to life with vibrant colors, and guitars were artfully placed in the lounge area.

The Belvedere model's hip, casual lifestyle appeals to young, urban professionals.

PHOTOS BY ERIC FIGGE





A neutral color palette allows the view from One Lexington to remain the number-one “wow” factor.

PHOTOS BY MARK BOISCLAIR



BEST INTERIOR MERCHANDISING
OF A HOME PRICED BETWEEN
\$500,000 AND \$1 MILLION

One Lexington

FIRST ACT: This high-rise, loft-style community in midtown Phoenix on a main thoroughfare began its life as a 17-story office building for Century Bank. Later, it was converted to condos called The Century Plaza.

SECOND ACT: Purchased in February 2010 by MacDonald Development Corp., and renamed One Lexington, these one-, two- and three-bedroom homes are back on the market at up to half the original price of Century Plaza.

THE STORY: The latest incarnation of this building has led to one of the fastest-selling projects in Phoenix, according to Claudia Gerster, owner/presi-

dent, Creative License, Intl. The community is 60 to 70 percent sold out. One of the factors in its success is the “less is more” merchandising, with structural beams remaining exposed, minimal accessories, and furniture Gerster describes as modern but “not too trendy-contemporary.”

Located near an area hospital, this 2846-square-foot penthouse model, priced at \$981,000, was tailored for an empty-nester or upscale professional couple, possibly a doctor and spouse in their own move-down second act. A loft-library, gold accents, and a large walk-in closet with granite countertops and cedar built-ins provided plenty of luxury.

To let the property and its value speak for themselves,

Sophisticated buyers have become leery of traditional marketing ploys.



Gerster eschewed the typical tricks of the trade. “We didn’t do photos of couples—didn’t do activity rooms.” She believes that sophisticated buyers have become leery of traditional marketing ploys. A neutral color palette allows the view from the model’s wraparound balcony to remain the number-one “wow” factor. “Bold colors would have detracted from that,” Gerster explains.

Community successes such as One Lexington have Phoenixians waxing optimistic. “This has been an incredible story for (MacDonald Development Corp.). And people will continue to come to Phoenix as soon as we absorb all that’s on the market,” says Gerster. •

BEST INTERIOR MERCHANDISING
OF A HOME PRICED OVER \$1 MILLION

BackRiver

FIRST ACT: At BackRiver, Developer Hastings Companies envisioned upscale townhomes in Hingham, Mass., to attract affluent, sophisticated buyers from the local Boston area. This would be an older crowd, wanting to escape maintenance, but not downsize in space or quality. A super-elegant design theme was created for the first model home, preconstruction, with silk fabrics and sophisticated flourishes. The first model debuted in October 2007.

SECOND ACT: Buyers turned out to be different than originally targeted. To get a true feel for the buyers' lifestyles, the merchandising team toured actual residents' homes, explains Chelsi Christensen, president of Design East Interiors.

What they found completely changed the merchandising strategy.

THE STORY: Buyers for this town-home community in a seaside town surprised even the experts. They turned out to be down to earth, well-traveled, and outdoor loving—more global than Old World. The new model, opened in spring 2010, followed suit, incorporating eclectic collections, pets and family heirlooms.

To appeal to this unique brand of over-50, semi-retired buyers, a dog-themed study, statues from Asia, a reclaimed dining table and loads of character set the stage. The master bedroom evoked that of an upscale hotel in Europe.

This corner model was blessed with a fully built-out wraparound deck offered as an upgrade. This was irresistibly merchandised with relaxing chairs, a grill and chiminea.

A bonus room was modeled as a “swing room,” explains Christensen,

“The new model more closely reflects our buyer profile.”

as it could serve double duty. The window seats morph into beds for visiting grandchildren. “A lesson learned from the first model was that we needed a space for grandchildren to live. The homes we toured all seemed to have a space for them. It was important for us to tell that story.” A cubby in the closet stowed toys and stuffed animals.

Tom Hastings, president of the Hastings Companies, reports a 300% increase in traffic and a significant increase in be-backs attributable to the new model. He adds that it has motivated buyers to purchase the floor plan with the modeled upgrades elsewhere in BackRiver. “The new model more closely reflects our buyer profile,” he says.

The townhomes, ranging from 2200 to 3600 square feet and priced from \$775,000 to \$1.4 million, have been selling at eight per year since October 2007. •

A bonus room at BackRiver was modeled as a “swing room,” serving double duty as an office and a guest room for grandchildren.

PHOTOS BY ERIC RALSTON IMAGERY & JEFF THEIBAETH PHOTOGRAPHY





A his-and-her office and a downstairs billiards and media room were on the owners' wish list at Villa Como.

PHOTOS BY RIXON PHOTOGRAPHY



BEST INTERIOR DESIGN
OF A CUSTOM HOME

Villa Como

FIRST ACT: This breathtaking home site was comprised of 20 feet of hard clay and the property was described as being “in rough shape.” A river and a 100-foot water setback requirement made for a tight build site.

SECOND ACT: This outstanding 16,000-square-foot custom home in Dover, New Hampshire took four years to plan and build for a couple longing for their dream home. But a team of builder C.M. Ragusa Company, architect Fiorentino Group, landscape designer Grounds for Living and interior designer Michael Cebula of Cebula Design transformed it into a dream come true.

THE STORY: When creating the interiors, Cebula took every aspect of the couple's lifestyle

The property on which Villa Como sits was originally described as being in “rough shape.” Today, it is reminiscent of the couple's Italian honeymoon.

into account, including golfing, boating, wine tasting and travel. The name Villa Como is reminiscent of the couple's Italian honeymoon. The designer borrowed the blue and green color scheme from the surrounding nature.

The crowning statement of the two-story great room is a canoe hanging from the rafters, and his and her zones were artfully delineated—hers for conversation, his for TV viewing, where a coffee table doubles as a game table. In the kitchen, described as the “heart of the home,” European milk bottles serve as pendant lights, and a mosaic depicts a European food market above the six-burner cook top.

On this property where sea turtles and osprey roam, floor-to-ceiling windows open entirely, converting a four-season room

into a porch when weather permits. Beyond, an artificial pond, guest house, fire pit, and tennis and bocce courts beckon.

The navy blue and coral master bedroom enjoys a river view, a disappearing TV and a two-story closet! The master bath has garden views. On the lower level, the bonus-of-all bonus rooms boasts a Tuscan mural, a wine room keeps 1800 bottles of wine at a perfect temperature, and a golf simulator keeps practitioners sharp. A scotch bar and billiard table join in on the fun.

In the room's home theater, sketches of Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, and Paul Newman were drawn by Ron Wood of the Rolling Stones. The couple are huge Rolling Stones fans—which makes sense, because their home is well on its way to becoming a classic! •

MERCHANDISING VERSUS STAGING—WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

BEST STAGING OF A NEW HOME

Indian Beach

JONI HITCHENS, designer for Echelon Interiors, has won “Nationals” awards for both merchandising and for staging. So how did she approach the two differently? We wanted to know.

“When you stage, it could very well come back into your inventory; you don’t always know that it is going to be permanent,” she says. “Sometimes you use what the client has or inventory that you have. Also, budgets are usually smaller.” The clean, contemporary atmosphere for Echelon Custom Builders’ spec home at Indian Beach lent itself well to staging as Hitchens allowed prospects to focus on the architectural details, rather than accessories and

furnishings. “This let the architectural elements shine through.”

This stunning spec home is surrounded by east coast waterways—one side is a bay, another the ocean and still another, a sailing club view. This led designer Joni Hitchens to a simple, calming interior and a color palette borrowed from the outside. Navies and whites, polished nickel hardware, Nautica® furniture and Sunbrella® fabrics were the perfect choices for a contemporary, sun-drenched home that could weather an active water-loving family. “The elements of sun, saltwater and chlorine all have to be kept in mind when decorating,” says Hitchens. This home was targeted to a family looking for a vacation or weekend getaway.

“The elements of sun, saltwater, and chlorine all have to be kept in mind when decorating.”

Outside, a pool, hot tub and outdoor shower have surrounding water views. Hitchens chose Brazilian cherry for the deck because it weathers better than teak, she explains. Right off the hot tub, outdoor steps enter a separate game/TV room for the kids, complete with a “downstairs” kitchen with barstools, dishwasher and icemaker.

But is it a good time to be building a spec home of this caliber? “If you are really good at what you do, you will always survive a recession,” replies Hitchens. At the time of this article, the home was under contract. “Working with a team that comes together really helps you get through this economy.” **smi**



A calming interior and a color palette borrowed from the outside were hallmarks of the home at Indian Beach.

PHOTOS BY ECHELON CUSTOM HOMES