

TAPPING TRADITION

NEWER HOMES BORROW ARTS & CRAFTS ELEMENTS TO CAPTURE COZY AND WARM FEEL

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Years ago, Stephanie and Craig Lindemann searched through home design magazines, looking for a style that could be turned into their custom-built house.

"You look and look and look, and they all begin to look the same," Stephanie remembered. "And then we saw a color photograph in the magazine of a home on a wooded lot. And we said, 'That's perfect.'"

The photo was an Arts & Crafts home. In 2000, the Lindemanns had a similar home custom built in the southern suburb of Homer Glen.

Nestled on a 1.4-acre wooded lot, it combines many of the signature features of the traditional Arts & Crafts style, including sloping roof lines, oversize eaves and natural building materials such as cedar and stone, which give the home a rustic appearance.

"The style is clean and uncluttered, neat and orderly," Stephanie said. "It's understated but still elegant. It's approachable. You feel comfortable when you come in."

Warm, comfortable and cozy are words that homeowners increasingly are using to describe the house they're seeking to live in, opting for well-crafted details and natural finishes over two-story foyers and echoey great rooms, say architects and builders. That has led to a revival of the Arts & Crafts-style houses, first built from about 1905 to 1930, in the city and the suburbs. The homes tend to feature peaked roofs, sloping roof lines, oversize eaves, dormers and covered porches and natural building materials, such as wood clapboard, cedar or wood shingle cladding. Interiors frequently are graced by stone fireplaces, exposed beams and rafters, wood detailing, window seats and other built-ins.

Just as the original Arts & Crafts movement at the turn of the last century represented a conscious break from the era of decorative Victorian houses that preceded it, the new generation of Arts & Crafts homes now being built may be a repudiation of today's impersonal McMansions, says Michael Buss, architect with Hickory Hills-based Michael Buss Architects Ltd.

Buss is a student of the style, having both rehabbed an original 1908 Arts & Crafts house in Champaign, owned by his sister, and designed a number of modern versions himself--including the Lindemanns' home.

The original Arts & Crafts style "had characteristics of quality detail and craftsmanship," said Wally Bekta, owner of Donlin Builders in Tinley Park. "It's unique, non-gaudy, the perfect representation of the Prairie State we live in."

That understated quality seems refreshing, because over the past decade or so, "homes

have gotten either very gaudy or somewhat plastic," said Bekta.

Bekta built the Lindemanns' Homer Glen home about three years ago and now is in the final stages of a 3-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath Arts & Crafts house in Elmhurst. The house features old-style millwork, square windows, transom windows between rooms, picture rails, hutches and cabinets, dining nooks and window seats.

There's some evidence that homeowners' appetite for bigger and bigger houses may have reached its limits. When asked to choose between a bigger house with fewer amenities or a smaller house with high quality products and amenities, 63 percent of the homeowners surveyed by National Association of Home Builders this year opted for the latter.

Bekta says the return of Arts & Crafts also has much to do with Baby Boomers arriving at an age and a level of affluence that allows them to buy homes that, he said, "bring back memories of the old Chicago bungalows many lived in."

Blast from the past

Gail Niermeyer, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Naperville, said a couple dozen Arts & Crafts houses have been built in the western suburb over the last few years.

"They are integrated more readily into the older neighborhoods, because they have a warmer, cottagey kind of feeling than, say, an all-brick or Dryvit home," Niermeyer said.

Inside, the house's "homey" feel attracts buyers, Niermeyer added. "People are looking for a warm, cozy, comfortable home. They're not interested in big spaces. Their living room [in an Arts & Crafts home] would be more like a parlor, a chatting area, than a huge living room that's non-functional. And there are also a lot of built-ins in these homes, such as cabinetry and bookcases, as well as paneled arched entries and stone fireplaces."

Hinsdale is another community that has embraced the newer Arts & Crafts-style houses, said Carol Lee Cikanek, an agent with Hinsdale's Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in the Village. The scale and look of the designs fit well into a community with an established housing stock.

"These homes have porches, screened-in back porches, a cozy curbside appeal. They have lasting appeal, rather than a stylistic approach. Stylistic is when someone says to me 10 years from now, 'Oh yeah, that was built back in 2005.' This is a home that 20 years from now will still feel like it fits in its place."

The adaptability of Arts & Crafts designs also suit Hinsdale, where lots were zoned a century ago and vary widely in size and shape, Cikanek noted. "These homes are less predictable, because they have to fit on different-sized lots and therefore have to be individually crafted," she pointed out.

Even production builders such as Centex Homes, KB Home and Neumann Homes have tapped into the Arts & Crafts trend. Research conducted among prospective homeowners found that the style was a favorite among homeowners, builders say.

"In focus groups, people will say, 'I think of sitting on my grandmother's porch growing up,'" said Midwest regional president Larry Wisdom of the Warrenville-based Neumann Homes. "What they want to do is bring back that old sense of feeling safe, comfortable, content."

To deliver that sense, Neumann Homes served up the Auburn model at its Clublands of Antioch community. The 2,385-square-foot, four-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath home is base priced at \$277,490 and offers Arts & Crafts design elements. They include a detailed wooden porch, distinctive shingles and shutters and three L-shaped brackets that emerge at the base of the roofline, as if supporting the roof. An important structural support feature in many original A & C homes, the modern versions are just for aesthetics, Wisdom said.

"It gives you a feeling of it being one of a kind," he said.

The Arts & Crafts style at the KB Homes' Oakmont community of 90 single-family homes at Gregg's Landing in Vernon Hills "was the most popular in the development," said marketing director Chris Walsh.

Featuring shingle or stucco above stone on the facades, exposed rafter tails off the rooflines, and porches anchored by heavy stone-and-wood columns and pillars, the homes also offer distinctive board-and-batten detailing--a traditional Arts & Crafts touch--in living rooms.

As for the Lindemanns, they're selling their Arts & Crafts home, finding it's too large now that their children are headed to college.

But Stephanie Lindemann still adores the style. "I want another one just like it," she said with a laugh. "Only smaller."

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What makes an Arts & Crafts home?

Comfortable and elegant, Craftsman-style houses, popular from 1905 to 1930, can be recognized by these features:

- Low-pitched roof
- Wide eaves with exposed rafters
- Decorative braces
- Porches with square columns
- The house often is built with materials found on the site or natural materials native to the region. Stone chimneys are a common element.
- Interiors emphasize form and function, and the design elements include wood and built-in spaces. Made of brick, tile or stone, fireplaces often are framed by bookshelves

or benches.

- Light fixtures and hardware relate as design elements.

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