

Big lots, loads of luxury amenities, and a high level of personalization are the markers of the increasingly common multimillion-dollar home.

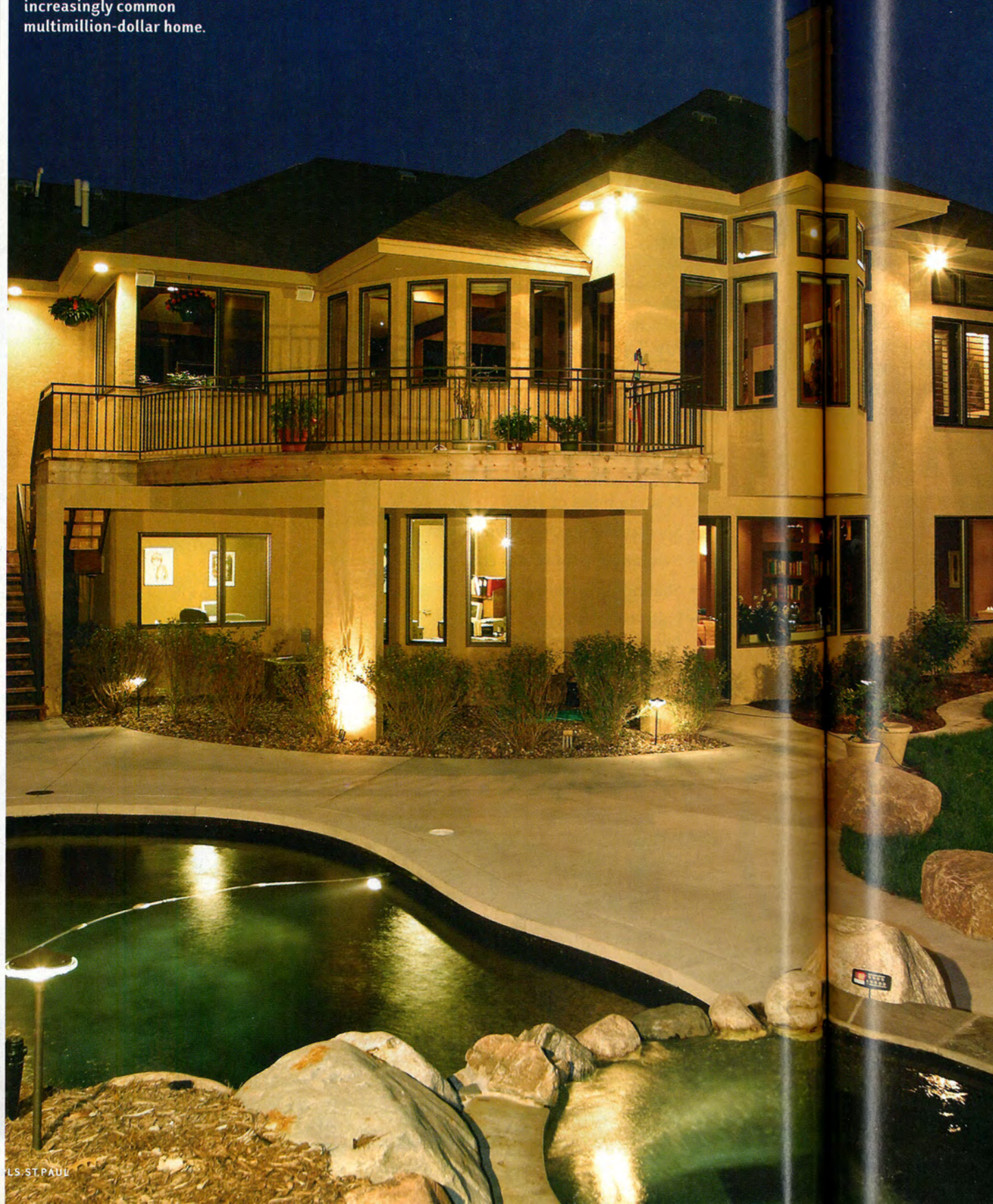


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Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?

All it gets you these days is a \$1 million house. Today, multimillion-dollar homes are setting the standard for luxury.

By Sarah Wyatt Elbert

Buying a \$1 million home just isn't what it used to be. As recently as a decade or two ago, it meant you were not just doing well, you were wealthy. Chances are, you lived in Edina or on Lake Minnetonka or Lake of the Isles or on St. Paul's Summit Avenue. You could not only afford to buy a \$1 million home, you could also afford to redecorate it every few years. People would slow down at night to peek inside the luxurious interior of your

beautiful dwelling. But things have changed.

Living in a \$1 million home today is almost (dare we say it?) common. "A million dollars is significantly more commonplace today than it was fifteen years ago," says Meredith Howell, a realtor with the Wayzata office of Coldwell Banker Burnett. "If you are living in a million-dollar house, it doesn't distinguish you as being super wealthy the way it used to."

Granted, for the majority of us in the Twin Cities,

where the median home price is about \$230,000, spending \$1 million on a home and piece of property is still well beyond our reach. And even for those who can afford \$1 million, housing market reality can be bruising.

"When a client comes in and says they want to spend a million dollars, I always feel bad telling them that it just isn't going to get them that much," says Jennifer Cramer-Miller, of L. Cramer Designers & Builders in Edina.

An audiophile's dream: a room devoted to music.



days, other than a purchase price that starts closer to \$1.5 million?

Cliché But True: Location, Location, Location

Spending \$2 million for a home on Lake Minnetonka obviously won't get you the same home in Eden Prairie or Lakeville, because land is more expensive in historically high-demand luxury neighborhoods. And those locations (communities on Lake Minnetonka, in Edina, on the Minneapolis chain of lakes, or on Summit Avenue) really haven't changed over the past twenty years, says Barry Berg a realtor with Coldwell Banker Burnett's Minneapolis Lakes office.

Those are areas where people are prepared to spend



Cozy seating nooks bring large-scale homes down to a more intimate scale

prices in the Twin Cities increased 55 percent in just five years, from September 2000 to September 2005, according to the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight. That means more multimillion-dollar homes were on the market. In 1995, twenty-three homes sold for more than \$1 million in the Twin Cities area, according to the Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors. Ten years later, 530 homes worth more than \$1 million were sold in the area.

And they weren't just located on Lake Minnetonka or in Edina. "It used to be if someone were trying to sell a \$1 million house in Eden Prairie, it was pretty much an oddity," Howell says, "but that's changed."

So if \$1 million homes have become much more common, then what makes a luxury home these

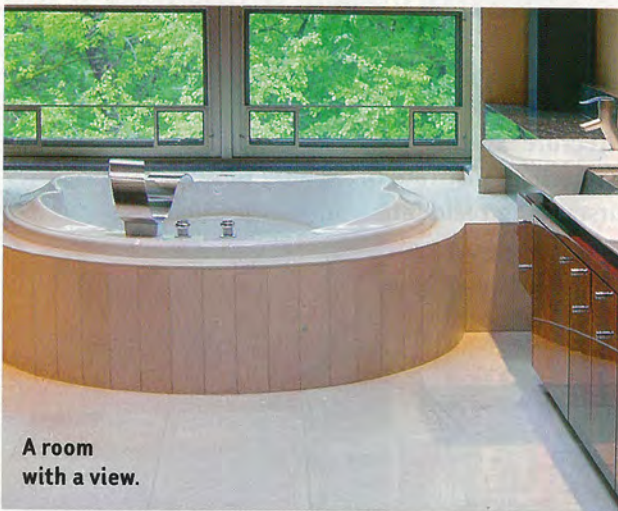
530 Twin Cities homes worth more than \$1 million sold in 2005.

a lot more than one million, and their cachet will likely remain strong, adds Kevin Ries with Edina Realty. What has changed is that other parts of the metropolitan area have seen the construction of more and more luxury homes, with high-end growth driven by several factors:

1. Water. Minnesotans are an active bunch, so it's no surprise that people place a premium on living near water. It lets them take full advantage of the summer months with easy access to waterskiing and sailing, and in the winter they can set up their ice-fishing huts right outside their back doors. Neighborhoods on



Small powder rooms get high-style treatment.



A room with a view.

Homes in Wayzata, which builds luxury homes in the Lake Minnetonka area, says he strives to build houses that fit the personalities of the homeowners, right down to small exterior and interior details and architectural design.

"The special planning, the windows, the roofs, the materials, the swimming pools, the core design is much more involved and interesting, therefore more expensive, but more desirable," he says. Some luxury trends Carlson has

observed include less carpet and more stone and wood floors; less drywall and more plaster, stone, and wood walls; and fewer manicured lawns and more landscaping that is beautiful and natural but doesn't require extensive upkeep.

Often homeowners think they want to build a smaller home, but by the time they're done consulting with the designer and putting their wishes on paper, they've come up with many more square feet, she says.

Many owners of luxury homes aren't asking for the "Not-So-Big House." They want the "So-Big House."

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Size Matters

There are two competing trends in the size of luxury homes: bigger and smaller. The bigger trend applies to everyone from families with multiple kids who need the room to spread out, to empty nesters who can afford to create the exact home of their dreams.

"I think there's been a real size inflation," Cramer-Miller says. "Despite what you're hearing often about the 'not-so-big house,' people aren't asking for the not-so-big house. They want the so-big house."

Bigger luxury homes can be the result of bigger rooms, with high ceilings and more modern open floor plans that flow into one another. Another trend is the creation of rooms to fill any conceivable leisure need, including home theaters, exercise rooms, sport courts, and hobby rooms. According to Cramer-Miller, the average L. Cramer home costs about \$2 million and is roughly 7,500 square feet.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, however, are those people who are looking for smaller homes that boast top-quality finishes and rooms that are efficiently tailored to their lifestyle. "It used to be when some of these mega-mansions were built that it was all about size," Howell says. "Things are starting to change now. People are going for higher quality and a smaller house."

A smaller luxury home may be designed to accommodate a family with children at home today, but which is also able to transition into a wonderful home for the couple once their kids have become independent.

"The spaces are getting smaller but the cost for that space per square foot is increasing," says Carlson of Jyland Distinctive Homes. "It's a different combination."

Regardless of size, location, or amenities, there is one factor that unites most luxury homes, whether a \$4 million 20,000-square-foot Craftsman house on Lake Minnetonka or a \$1.5 million 4,000-square-foot contemporary home in St. Paul: the definition of luxury is in the eye of the mortgage-holder. ♦

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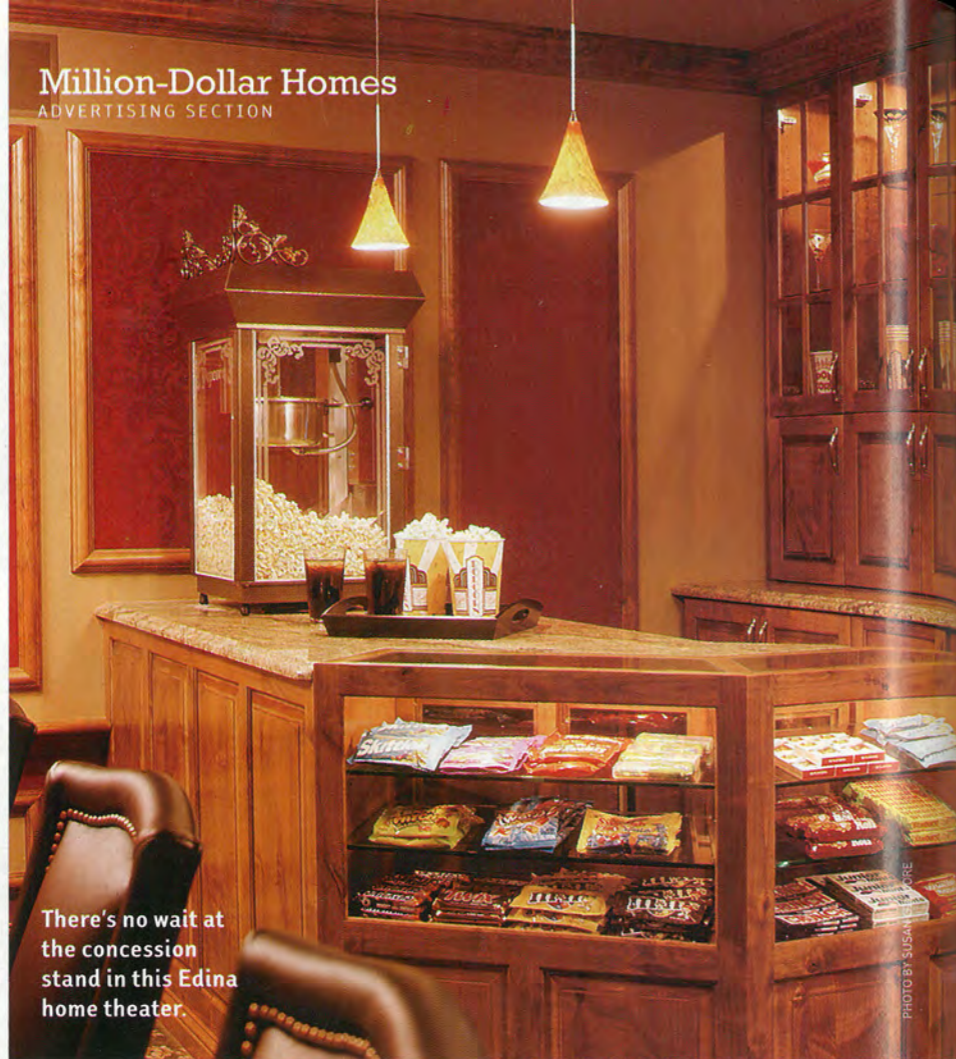
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White Bear Lake and along the Minnesota River bluffs or the St. Croix River have seen their share of high-end home construction over the past ten years.

2. Golf. Another plus in the location category is living on a golf course, like the Bearpath development in Eden Prairie or along The Legends Golf Club in Credit River Township. For active golfers, being located right on their favorite course means they can play every day if they want. And for families, golf course developments offer a close-knit gated community, access to nature, and often the benefits of a country club with tennis and a swimming pool.

3. Acreage. Some people just want to go home to get away from it all. So houses built on huge lots in the outlying suburbs also have something to offer luxury homeowners: lots of space to spread out and enjoy the vistas without the neighbor kids hitting a baseball through their garage

windows. "If we get outside the core first-tier suburbs and/or the city, we're either going to be on water or we're going to have acreage," Berg says. Areas like Medina have become popular for luxury homes, with some people building their homes on up to eighty-acre lots, Cramer-Miller says.

4. Proximity to the city or work. Sometimes a neighborhood isn't on water or a golf course, and yet people still build multimillion-dollar homes there because they are conveniently located to work, friends, or relatives. "People live where they live because of their social connections," Ries says. "They're connected to their zip code for some reason. Address is important to people."

In the Details

Many, if not all, luxury homeowners today expect a large degree of personalization and details. They're looking for homes that have everything they want—and even some

amenities they didn't know they wanted until the homebuying process began. For this reason, many opt to build their own dream home in their desired location, even if they have to tear down an existing house to do it.

"The pharaoh doesn't want to live in someone else's palace," Ries says. "They don't want a used Mercedes; they want one with the sticker still on it."

Desired amenities can mean everything from detailed crown moldings and imported or reclaimed wood floors to luxury personal spas, integrated technology throughout the home, and extra rooms for grandchildren or specific hobbies.

"If you look back to the 1980s, houses were so much simpler to build because everyone wanted white walls and white cupboards and white Corian countertops," Cramer-Miller says. "Today there are so many different things happening in homes: furniture-style cabinetry, architectural details, mill-

The pharaoh
doesn't want
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else's palace.

work. That defines a luxury home for many people."

L. Cramer, she says, has built rooms for nearly every hobby—from rooms for children to play musical instruments or practice their ballet dancing to a room equipped with a real NASCAR race car, movie screen, and computer software to simulate the racing experience.

Bob Carlson of Jyland Distinctive

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William Swanson, a senior editor at *Mpls. St. Paul Magazine*, has written and edited for Twin Cities publications and elsewhere for more than thirty years.

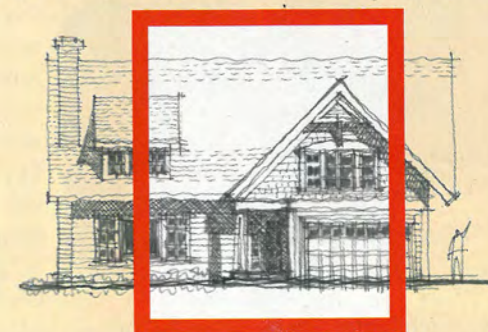
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Prairie School designs are known for their millwork and clean lines.

"In this style, try to keep the architecture of the room very clean but with the use of natural products for the floors, walls, and windows treatments," says Goodrich. "A wood floor with an area rug is ideal."

And be prepared for linear living. "The architecture hugged the prairie," Beson says. "It has a very horizontal feel."

Modern and Soft Contemporary

Minimalist and sleek, modern also takes the form of "soft contemporary"—an amalgam of clean interior and exterior horizontal lines, light colors, and expansive swaths of glass, metal, and light wood. Open spaces dominate the living areas, with the kitchen, breakfast, and living areas all running into each other.

"Contemporary is back in a big way, but this time it appears to be more than a trend," O'Hara says. "Because

the lines are so clean, because of the lack of clutter, and because of the simplicity of color, a big part of this look is texture."

Accent fabrics are made of cork, leather, or even metal. Furniture is constructed out of metal, wood, Lu-

tend to be larger in scale.

Draperies give way to sleeker, edgier treatments like sunshades, shoji screens, or sliding panels. Accessories are kept to a minimum; artwork or sculpture picks up the slack. "Clean up the clutter!" says Goodrich. "Try to

art of design, where no choice seems to be the wrong choice and no end result is ever the same as another."

It's also a style that can risk looking cold and trendy. But as one of the most popular styles

Smooth finishes and a minimum of accessories distinguish the modern aesthetic.

cite, or glass. Finishes tend to be light or very dark, and art is sparse yet bold. As for colors, neutrals and monochromatic hues with splashes of vivid colors rule. Smooth finishes (marble, granite, stainless steel, and chrome) are abundant, and a less-is-more technique is applied to furnishings, which

use, or purchase, a few 'wow' accessories and artwork."

Modern is a clean, unfettered aesthetic. Although geometric shapes are used, there are few patterns and slimmer profiles. "You can't just look in a book and know what this style means," Watson says. "This is the true

that designers, architects, and builders see, it can easily be turned into something warm and inviting.

"If a home is well thought out and well-planned in advance, people will be in [these homes] longer," says Smuckler, who has

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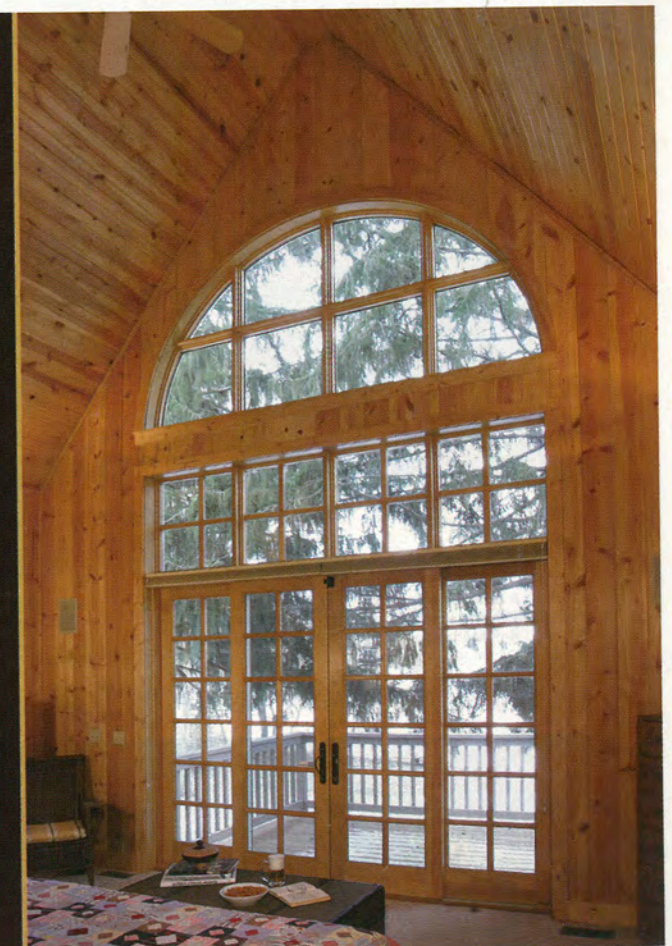


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Most homes are a blend of complementary styles.

designed and built more than 300 homes in the last twenty-five years. “Minnesota people tend to want soft contemporary interiors but more traditional on the outside, more homey.”

In the Mix

As singular as each of these styles is, it is entirely possible to mix them up—and most people tend toward it naturally. “Most people don’t say ‘We want a certain type of house,’” Beson says. “Most people have a more eclectic mix.”

Lenzen agrees. “I believe in blending two styles when appropriate,” he explains. “I believe that architecture should

be vibrant, creative, and not restricted by a definitive set of rules. Creative ideas build upon previous ideas and concepts, just as these four styles were created.”

So feel free to incorporate different pieces from different looks into the same space. Lenzen likes to blend Craftsman and Prairie School. Beson throws French and Italian pieces together (“Everybody really copied everybody anyway,” he says). Just make sure the sizes relate.

“There are, of course, things that don’t go together,” Beson says. “but it really depends on the talent of the person mixing the pieces.”

Using quality materials will also ensure that your home makes the kind of statement you want it to. Invest in a fantastic rug or carpet, a piece of art, chandeliers, window treatments, or furniture like a statement-making buffet, breakfast, or desk. The attention to detail won’t go unnoticed. ♦



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