

2026 DESIGN TRENDS

MOVING REAL ESTATE

Weaving the Story of Home

Paint Colors That Sell

The Voice of the Consumer in the Psychology of Home

The New Starter Home

Redefining the Entry Point to Homeownership

**Better
Homes**
and Gardens.
REAL ESTATE



Where Design, Lifestyle and Real Estate Meet

A home’s design sets the tone long before the paperwork begins. It invites, inspires and often seals the deal. Many buyers simply know “this is the one” the moment they lay eyes on the interior of a home, and 84% say design details help them imagine living in a space¹. That spark often comes from layout, color, outdoor living and the small touches that make a house feel like home.

This report draws on a consumer study conducted by thinqinsights for Better Homes and Gardens® Real Estate, paired with insights from a BHGRE® affiliated agents survey as well as leading voices from across the real estate and design industries to reveal what matters most to today’s buyers, from first impressions to final decisions.

These trends go beyond style. They reveal how people want to live, what they value most and how they choose where to build their future.

THE FINDINGS HIGHLIGHT SIX DEFINING TRENDS, INCLUDING:

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As the road to homeownership grows longer and more challenging, buyers’ standards for that initial point of entry have evolved. While many are still open to smaller footprints, they are far less willing to compromise on emotional connection. Today’s buyers want homes that feel right, with natural beauty, thoughtful design and personality.

Trend 2: Paint Colors That Sell _____ 8

The shade and quality of both interior and exterior paint has never been more critical to a home’s value. Buyers say color plays an outsized role in their first impressions, and they are increasingly drawn to natural, earth-inspired tones alongside timeless neutrals and creams.

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Social media has become one of the biggest forces behind today’s design trends. The features that earn millions of saves online, like organized pantries, cozy nooks and handcrafted kitchens, are now showing up on buyers’ wish lists and influencing what they expect to see in person.

Trend 4: The 3 Ls (and it’s not location): Layout, Layout, Layout _____ 16

Space is no longer just a square footage number. With prices near record highs, buyers are prioritizing flow, functionality and multi-purpose zones that adapt to hybrid work, multigenerational living and shifting lifestyles.

Trend 5: Craftsmanship in the Details _____ 20

Handcrafted touches are finding a new appreciation. Custom millwork, natural materials and artisanal finishes give homes warmth, individuality and a sense of permanence that buyers are willing to pay for.

Trend 6: Love at First Sight _____ 24

First impressions still matter, but today’s curb appeal is more about care and simplicity than curbside drama. Buyers respond to exteriors that feel calm and natural rather than bold or overdone. Native landscaping, natural finishes and welcoming entries create a sense of balance and say “home” at first glance.

Trend 1

The New Starter Home

REDEFINING THE ENTRY POINT TO HOMEOWNERSHIP

For many years, the starter home was about compromise. Smaller rooms. A little less style. Fewer frills. A place to land for a little while before moving on to something “better.” That narrative has evolved.

Today’s buyers are entering the market with sharper expectations and a clearer sense of what makes a house feel like home. Emotional connection, lifestyle fit and thoughtful design now shape the journey as much as practical considerations. For many buyers, a dream home is defined not by how much space it has but by how well that space lives.

When buyers describe their dream home, functionality and flexibility rise to the top, followed closely by outdoor living spaces designed for gathering and relaxing. Many dream of homes near water or nestled in nature. Kitchens continue to be the emotional heart of the home, especially for women, while men lean toward smart features and great views.

A MARKET IN TRANSITION

Economic forces are reshaping how people enter the market. “Millennials, Gen Y and Gen Z are less fixated on homeownership than their parents and grandparents,” says Caleb Silver, Chief Business Editor, People Inc. “The notion of a 30-year mortgage that locks up their money for that long is making less and less sense to them, especially at these prices and mortgage rates.”

That shift marks a broader redefinition of homeownership, where flexibility and lifestyle now matter as much as long-term investment. “Boomers are sitting on fortunes that are tied up in their homes, and 40% or more have no mortgage.

Generational preferences reveal deeper patterns.

- *Gen Z values privacy and nature*
- *Millennials lean toward big kitchens and decks for entertaining*
- *Gen X prioritizes practicality*
- *Baby Boomers emphasize comfort and accessibility*



Their home is their ‘nest egg,’ and many are likely to stay put,” Silver explains. “Gen Z and millennials are more interested in having experiences, which may mean living in various cities and in various homes throughout their adult lives.”

Silver also notes how technology is reshaping how younger buyers find homes. “They are much more likely to use online platforms for their home searches and are finding creative ways to use data to alert them to opportunities,” he says.

For today’s buyers, the right fit often matters as much as the price tag—a shift that’s redefining the meaning of a starter home.

THREE BIG FORCES ARE RESHAPING HOW WE THINK ABOUT STARTER HOMES

Affordability Opens the Door

Price and location remain the top considerations for 60% of buyers¹. “Given the rise in median home prices and the ever-rising costs of actually owning a home, smaller, more reasonable homes are a natural option for first-time buyers,” says Silver.

Lifestyle Drives Design

Eighty-six percent of buyers say flexible layouts help them see beyond a home’s size¹. Lifestyle trends are pushing that expectation even further. People are looking for spaces that work harder, with rooms that shift between work, rest, play or blended households. “We are also seeing a broadening trend of multigenerational living with kids returning from college and aging parents moving in with their kids,” adds Silver.

Connection Seals the Deal

Nearly half of buyers¹ say finding a home that truly feels like “home” is the most important factor in their decision. Natural light, calming colors, smart storage and even a small outdoor space play a starring role in creating that emotional connection.

WHERE LIVABILITY EXTENDS BEYOND THE WALLS

Buyers are choosing homes that feel good to live in. More than three quarters of BHGRE® affiliated agents say outdoor extensions like patios, balconies and small yards make the biggest difference in how livable a home feels². Sixty-three percent point to big windows and natural light, and 55% highlight multi-functional rooms like office or guest room hybrids².

This echoes what buyers say. More than half (53%) say layout and floor plan are a top priority, followed closely by overall size (48%) and outdoor space¹ (38%). While square footage still matters, what is really driving decisions is how a home lives. People aren't just looking for more room. They're looking for spaces that work harder and feel better.

53%
OF BUYERS SAY THAT
LAYOUT AND FLOOR PLAN
ARE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

People aren't just looking for more room. They're looking for spaces that work harder and feel better.

COMPACT HOMES WITH BIG PERSONALITY

The new starter home is defined by how well it works. Sixty-two percent of agents say natural light and openness help buyers see beyond square footage². Sixty percent say updated kitchens and baths give smaller homes a sense of luxury². Fifty-two percent point to smart storage as an emotional cue that makes a home feel “worth it”².

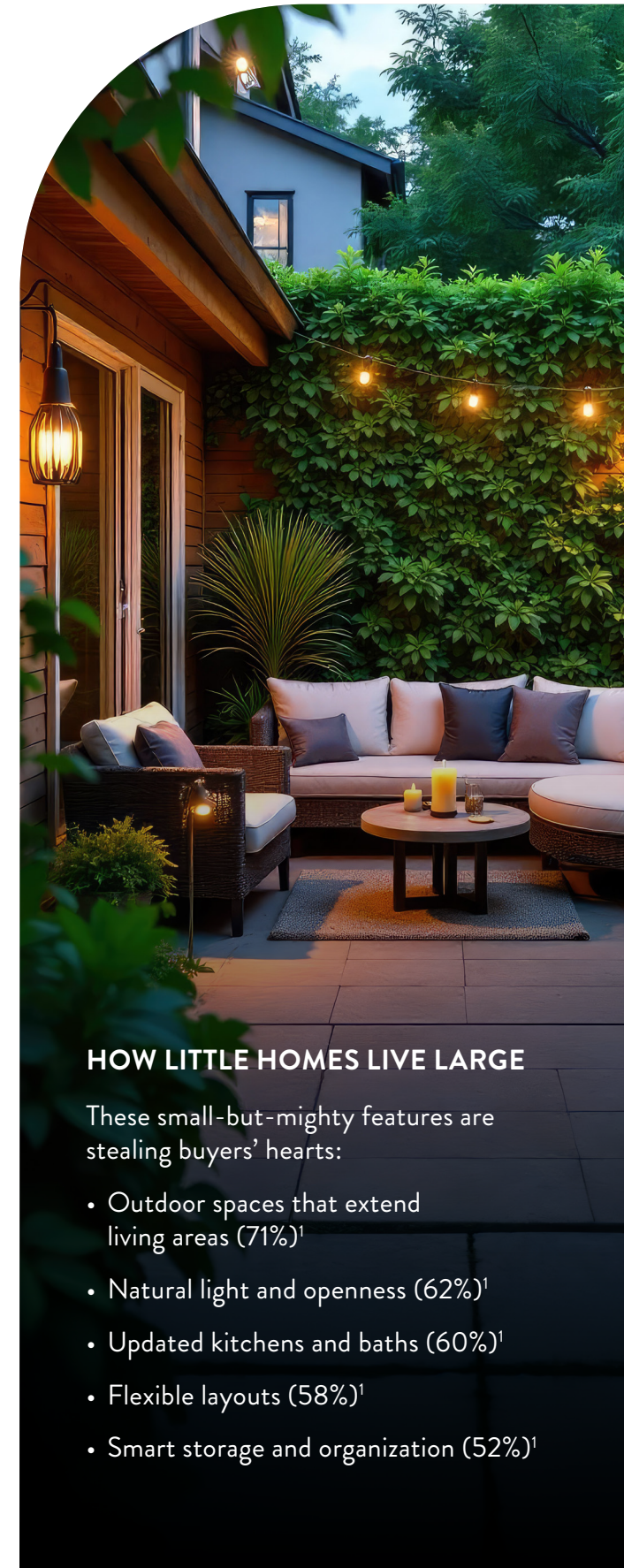
For Lauren Bengtson, Senior Home Editor at *Better Homes & Gardens*®, it comes down to thoughtful design moments that make a space live larger. “Add a sense of architecture anywhere you can. If the home already has it, draw attention to it.” If not, add it through moldings, built-ins and panel-ready appliances that give spaces a clean, elevated look. She is also a big believer in biophilic design with lots of plants, natural materials and ample daylight.

“Lighting deserves a full design plan of its own,” Bengtson explains. Layered lighting can make spaces feel larger and more intentional. And when it comes to furniture, less is often more. A few high-style silhouettes make a room feel thoughtful without overwhelming it.

She's seeing a rise in architectural details that add visual interest without sacrificing light. “I think we'll see a renaissance of the room divider, like the cool, architectural ones from the 60s and 70s, but made more modern. I've been seeing several homes with interior glass walls that create separation without inhibiting the light—they create an incredible sense of uniqueness.”

Thoughtful design has the power to make small spaces feel special. Those moments stay with buyers long after they've left the home.

“The starter homes people fall in love with aren't always the biggest,” says Ginger Wilcox, President of Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate LLC. “They're the ones that instantly feel welcoming, the ones with the small, intentional touches, like natural light, a thoughtful layout, or a cozy spot outside, that make a house feel like home.”



HOW LITTLE HOMES LIVE LARGE

These small-but-mighty features are stealing buyers' hearts:

- Outdoor spaces that extend living areas (71%)¹
- Natural light and openness (62%)¹
- Updated kitchens and baths (60%)¹
- Flexible layouts (58%)¹
- Smart storage and organization (52%)¹



Trend 2

Paint Colors That Sell

THE VOICE OF THE CONSUMER IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOME

This year, color is playing a bigger role than ever in how buyers connect with a home. More than half say wall color influences how they feel in a space. That emotional reaction can shape whether they imagine themselves living there, whether the space feels calming or chaotic, and whether they are ready to make an offer¹.

RETURNING TO THE EARTH

Forty percent of buyers say paint color strongly shapes their first impression, and another third say it catches their attention¹. Calming neutrals continue to lead the way, with more than a third preferring soft creams, grays, and beiges¹.

Bengtson sees this natural shift as part of a larger design story. “I think perhaps the biggest design movement for 2026 is going to be something about returning to the earth in all aspects of the sense,” she says. “I’m talking about natural color palettes drawn straight from the earth, especially the warmer, muddier hues like terra cotta, olive green, muddy brown and earthy grays. This applies to tile and with designers turning to natural materials like travertine, clay and terra cotta that create an inherently organic, plucked-from-nature feel.”

Bengtson predicts these tones, along with ochre and mushroom or clay browns with a touch of charcoal or gray, will dominate interiors in 2026, bringing a grounded sophistication that can make even a modest space feel elevated.

That feeling matters. When asked how fresh paint would influence their offer, 73% of buyers said it would play a role, with nearly a third calling it a major factor¹.

It’s not just about the palette itself. Homeowners are rethinking how they use paint to shape entire rooms, adding depth, personality and a sense of place through bolder, more intentional choices.

WHAT COLORS BUYERS LOVE (AND WHAT TURNS THEM OFF)

Ninety-three percent of BHGRE® affiliated agents say calming neutrals get the best reaction². Nearly half point to nature-inspired hues like sage and soft blue, with many also leaning toward warm traditional tones². On the other hand, 86% of agents warn that bright neon colors can hurt a sale, along with reds, purples and highly personalized paint choices like murals or themed rooms².

These color choices are shaping how buyers experience spaces, making paint one of the simplest but most powerful tools for creating an emotional connection.

HOW HOMEOWNERS ARE PLAYING WITH PAINT

Beyond color itself, Bengtson is noticing clear shifts in how homeowners are using paint. “They are becoming a lot less afraid to paint the trim and doors a bolder, contrasting color, like blue, green or yellow,” she says. She’s also seeing more painted ceilings and color-washing, with entire rooms wrapped in a single hue. “I think that the accent wall is out, and the all-over walls are in. Instead of painting or wallpapering one wall, it’s go big and all-over or not at all.”



BHGRE® Color of the Year

Based on insights from both consumers and agents, one theme is clear: buyers are leaning toward soft, nature-inspired hues that feel calm, grounded and timeless. The response helped pinpoint the top color for 2026, a shade that not only resonates with today’s homebuyers but also offers sellers a strategic edge when preparing a property for market. The shade reflects the “return to earth” movement, creating homes that feel connected to the natural world.



FARROW & BALL[®]

GREEN BLUE
NO. 84

BENJAMIN MOORE[®]

SCENIC DRIVE
697

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS[®]

FOREVER GREEN
SW 9653

Two Colors to Watch

GROUNDING GARDEN GREEN

According to the survey, 42% of respondents are drawn to soft, nature-rooted greens that bring a sense of balance and renewal into the home¹. These shades feel both fresh and timeless, reflecting a desire for interiors that restore calm and create a natural connection between indoor and outdoor spaces.

This family of greens ranges from gentle leafy tones to subtle blue-greens that suggest filtered sunlight and the quiet beauty of a garden. They pair beautifully with natural textures like stone, wood and linen, adding depth and warmth to living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms. Whether used throughout a space or as a subtle accent, these hues create a feeling of grounded elegance that feels current yet enduring, helping turn homes into sanctuaries that feel alive, balanced and at peace.

Interior Paint Color of the Year

As lifestyles evolve, interior palettes are shifting toward softer, nature-inspired hues. Homebuyers prefer a color that creates a sense of calm and comfort, bringing warmth, balance and light into the spaces where they spend the most time.

Calming Coastal Blue

According to the survey, 52% of respondents favored airy, nature-inspired shades reminiscent of open skies and coastal light¹. These soft blues create a feeling of serenity and optimism. They brighten interiors while still feeling timeless and grounded, reflecting a growing desire for spaces that feel calm, open and connected to the natural world.

This family of blues includes pale sky tones with soft gray undertones and misty blue-greens that capture the freshness of seaside air. They are light enough to make small rooms feel more spacious yet subtle enough to serve as versatile neutrals. Whether used on walls, cabinetry or accents, these hues bring quiet energy and a sense of ease to a room, helping homes feel welcoming, natural and bright without being bold or overpowering.

NEUTRAL ACCENT

Buyers are also embracing a warmer, more tactile palette that brings quiet comfort to modern interiors. These soft neutrals and earthy tones feel collected and personal, blending natural light with the textures of wood, clay and woven fibers.

This family of colors includes soft pinked neutrals, sand-washed beige and gentle terra cotta tones that add depth without overpowering a room. They work beautifully across open floor plans, providing a warm backdrop that transitions easily from one space to another. Layered with natural fabrics and organic finishes, they create an inviting, sunlit atmosphere that feels both current and timeless, reminding us that calm can also feel warm, textured and full of life.

FARROW & BALL[®]

KAKELUGN
NO. 317

BENJAMIN MOORE[®]

SEAVIEW
836

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS[®]

SLEEPY HOLLOW
SW 9145



BENJAMIN MOORE[®]

BURLAP
2163-50

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS[®]

MELLOW MAUVE
SW 0039

FARROW & BALL[®]

TEMPLETON PINK
NO. 303

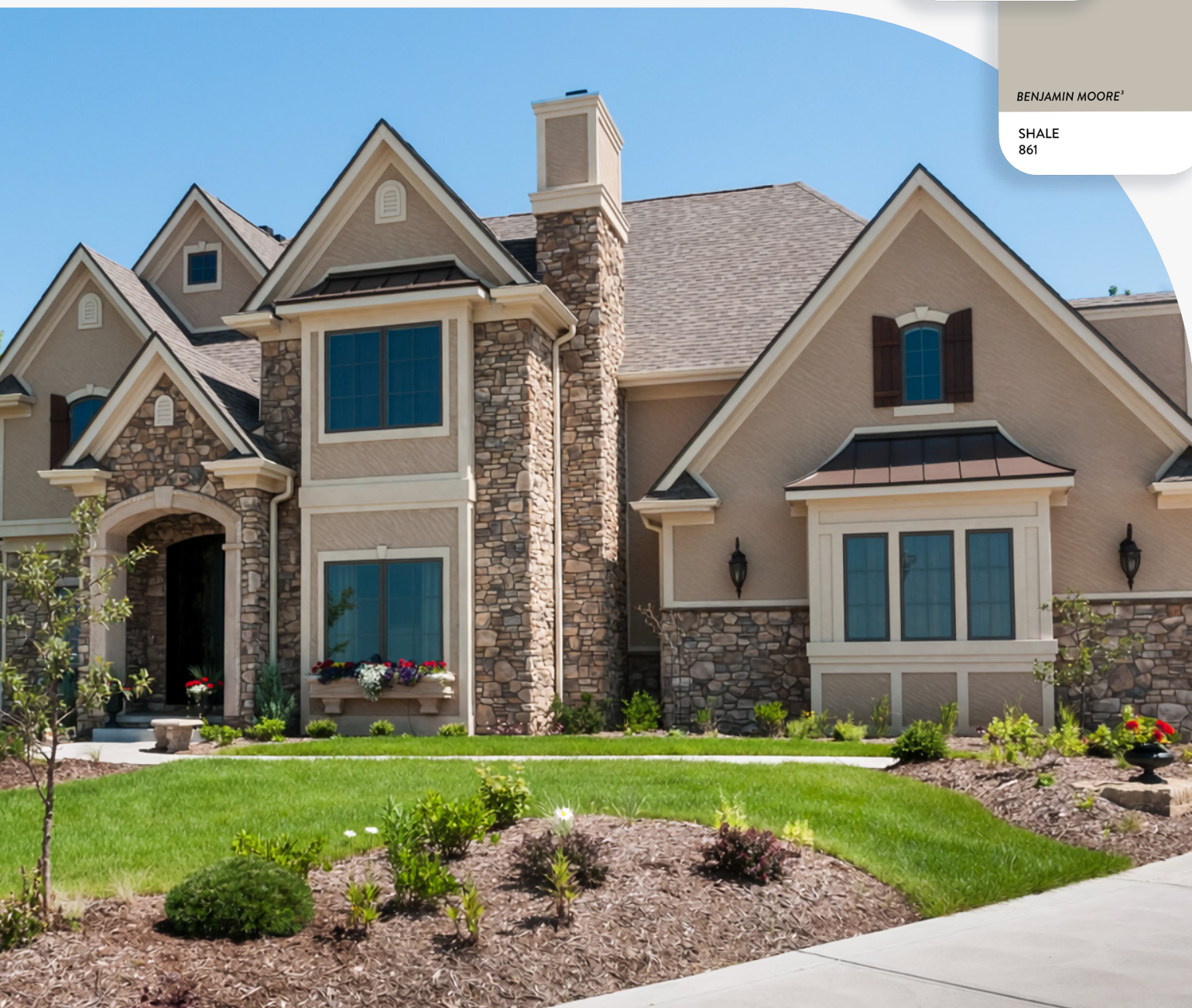
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Exterior Paint Color of the Year

Exterior preferences followed the suit of interior palettes. Homebuyers chose a natural, enduring tone that creates a welcoming first impression with a color that feels perfectly at home in their surroundings.

Soft Stone Grey

Nearly one in four respondents preferred light, stone-inspired grays that bring quiet sophistication to the exterior¹. These shades echo weathered limestone and coastal fog, striking a balance between modern and traditional. They pair easily with white trim, black accents and natural materials like wood and slate. Soft and refined, these stone grays add a timeless sense of calm to a home's curb appeal.



SHERWIN-WILLIAMS¹
COLONNADE GRAY
SW 7641

FARROW & BALL¹
PURBECK STONE
NO. 275

BENJAMIN MOORE¹
SHALE
861

Other Colors That Made a Statement

DEEPER CHARCOAL NEUTRAL

The next most popular choices lean darker, with more homeowners showing interest in deep, charcoal-based neutrals that give homes a strong, modern presence¹. These rich hues create contrast and highlight architectural details. When paired with warm wood accents or soft white trim, they feel both dramatic and inviting. These sophisticated grays are ideal for those who want a contemporary look that still feels natural and grounded.



SHERWIN-WILLIAMS¹
GRANITE PEAK
SW 6250

BENJAMIN MOORE¹
ANCHOR GRAY
2126-30

FARROW & BALL¹
DOWN PIPE
NO. 26

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS¹
SALTY DOG
SW 9177

FARROW & BALL¹
STIFFKEY BLUE
NO. 281

BENJAMIN MOORE¹
STUNNING
826

DEEP BLUE

Buyers are also gravitating toward classic navy tones that bring depth and character to the exterior. Inspired by deep water and open sky, these blues feel confident and enduring. They work beautifully on both coastal and inland homes, adding richness and personality without overpowering the design. When balanced with crisp trim or natural stone, these hues make a lasting first impression that feels refined and welcoming.

Trend 3

The Influence of Influencers

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO THE TRANSACTION: HOW HOME TRENDS ARE SHAPING BUYER BEHAVIOR

Home trends have never been more visible, or more shareable. Social media has transformed what used to be tucked away in design magazines into a 24/7 feed of inspiration that's a scroll and a save away. What buyers once imagined as distant "someday" ideas are now instantly accessible, shoppable and often DIY-able. That constant visibility is quietly rewriting buyer expectations.

"Buyers are able to see outside the box now," says design influencer Kelsey Mansingh of

Newbuild Newlyweds. "They can see potential in spaces and have more ideas of what they can do in a home, and maybe aren't looking for a home that has it all nowadays. The more a house reflects who you are, the more you feel at home." Mansingh and her husband, Ryan, share their home journey with an audience of more than 500,000.

The styled pantry saved at 2 a.m., the cozy "book room," and that homesteader kitchen with warm wood and a farmhouse sink are no longer just aspirational. They're showing up on must-have lists. And when buyers find them in real life, they move faster.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT

Nearly half of buyers say social media influences what they want in a home at least somewhat, and one in five say it shapes their preferences a great deal¹. At the same time, half of BHGRE® affiliated agents say buyers mention Instagram- or TikTok-inspired design ideas during home tours.

"In terms of where homeowners are getting their inspiration, I would say that is a mixed bag," says Bengtson. "Personally, I turn to Pinterest and Instagram. I would guess that most Gen Z-ers would say TikTok."

She's seeing color-washing, picture frame molding and wainscoting cross over from trend posts to real homes. "There is a huge 'cottage' movement, as well as a bit of American Traditionalism with floral patterns, natural woods and spindle legs," she says. "Retro is huge. We are sensing a bigger return of 60s and 70s design. I think Gen Z-ers are just now discovering how cool it can be."

FROM INSPIRATION TO IDENTITY

Social media is shaping more than trends. It is shaping expectations. The kitchens, cozy corners and handcrafted details that rack up millions of saves online are now on buyers' wish lists when they walk through a home.

The numbers tell the story: 58% of buyers want walk-in pantries with organized storage¹. Nearly half are drawn to homesteader-style kitchens with artisanal touches¹. More than a third love styled spots like coffee bars and mudroom drop zones¹. Agents notice it, too. Most say these curated spaces make the biggest impression during showings, along with clean, edited surfaces that keep the focus on the home².



NEARLY
1/2
OF BUYERS
SAY THAT
**SOCIAL MEDIA
INFLUENCES
WHAT THEY
WANT IN A
HOME¹**

What is driving this? It is more than aesthetics. These choices signal personality and care. "Libraries, offices and stylish mudrooms are moving from trend to staple," says Bengtson. "There is a huge emphasis on making every space feel intentional." Homeowners are leaning into pieces with history such as thrifted finds, family heirlooms and items that tell a story.

Mansingh sees the same influence from DIY culture. "Watching DIY content gives our audience knowledge, confidence and inspiration," she explains. She also sees it reflected in her own work. "Our hidden Murphy bed in office cabinetry and our home library and reading nook are our most replicated projects," she says. Even pet spaces are part of the conversation. "Everyone wants a dedicated space for their pet now that they have seen our cat bedroom."

Inspiration is moving off screens and into the details that bring a home to life.



Trend 4

The 3 Ls (and it's not location): Layout, Layout, Layout

FLEXIBILITY IS THE NEW SQUARE FOOTAGE

Once upon a time, floor plans were something you squinted at on paper. Today, they are the heartbeat of the home. In 2026, buyers are not just shopping for bedrooms and baths. They are shopping for layouts that live as dynamically as they do.

Layout is both practical and emotional, shaping how people move through a home and how that home makes them feel. It's often the spark that creates an instant connection.

Rising costs are also shaping how buyers think about space. Instead of focusing on square footage alone, they're looking for homes that flex with their lives and work smarter.

Design influencer Mansingh says she's seeing this shift unfold in real time as homeowners reimagine how their homes live. "Spaces people can customize and make their own are becoming more important," she says. Buyers want homes that adapt to their routines and priorities. What matters most is how well a space works, not how big it is.

WHEN SMALL LIVES BIG

With prices still high, buyers are rethinking what makes a home feel "big." Smart use of space, built-in storage, easy flow between rooms and zones that serve more than one purpose are the new hallmarks of a great floor plan.

Modern life rarely follows a neat blueprint. Hybrid work schedules, multigenerational living, side hustles and wellness routines blur the lines between living, working and unwinding. Buyers want spaces that can shift with their lives, not box them in.

Bengtson sees this shift taking shape in design trends. "Smart furniture layouts, adding walls, room dividers or glass walls, and using area rugs and light fixtures to define spaces are helping designers balance openness with privacy," she says. "There's a huge shift away from open concept."

WHAT BUYERS ARE ACTUALLY ASKING FOR

Flexibility and flow top the layout wish list. According to a BHGRE® affiliated agent poll, 76% say outdoor living extensions like patios, porches and balconies are the most requested². Sixty-one percent say buyers want flex rooms that can morph into whatever life requires².

Another 46% point to zoned open plans that keep things airy but still defined, while more than a third highlight expanded storage near entryways, kitchens and bedrooms². Roughly a third say dual primary suites appeal to co-buyers and multigenerational families who need both flexibility and privacy².

Buyers echo those priorities. More than a third say organized storage tops their wish list, followed by outdoor living spaces and zoned open plans¹. Adaptable rooms and dual primary suites come next, showing that people care less about how big a home is and more about how well it works.



76%

OF AGENTS SAY THAT
OUTDOOR LIVING EXTENSIONS
ARE THE MOST REQUESTED

61%

OF AGENTS SAY THAT BUYERS
WANT **FLEX ROOMS** FOR
THEIR CHANGING NEEDS



THE RISE OF CREATIVE FLEX

This shift goes beyond simply having an extra room. Designers and homeowners are reimagining how every corner can pull its weight. “Yes to all of the above,” says Bengtson when asked about new approaches to flex design, like hybrid furniture, convertible partitions and rooms that serve functions we wouldn’t have expected five years ago.

“In addition to that, using unexpected spaces to serve a larger function like turning a closet into a bar or office, a stairway landing into a library, or an unused room into a wellness space for yoga or meditation.”

Mansingh sees that same creative thinking play out in real homes. “We turned a formal dining room into our office and spare bedroom because we had no need for a formal dining room,” she explains. “And in terms of resale value, this was also a plus because we gained a bedroom.”

Flexibility isn’t just a trend. It is becoming the foundation of what makes a house feel like home.



Top 5 Buyer-Approved Layout Features

1. Outdoor living extensions
2. Flex rooms
3. Zoned open plans
4. Smart storage
5. Dual primary suites



On the Way Out

- Small, closed-off rooms
- Formal dining rooms
- Oversized open concepts

Trend 5

Craftsmanship in the Details

THE RETURN OF THOUGHTFUL DESIGN

For years, minimalism and mass production set the tone for home design. In 2026, something warmer is winning people over. Buyers are craving homes that feel rooted, personal and built with care. Hand-laid tile, custom millwork and natural materials are back in the spotlight. These are the details that quietly make a house feel like a home—thoughtful and unique.

This return to craft is part of a broader shift toward homes that reflect individuality. Buyers are looking for spaces with character and soul, places where the details tell a story. “People are more creative and more empowered to make their home the way they want,” says Mansingh. These handcrafted touches, whether it is a custom built-in or a unique architectural detail, make spaces feel personal and memorable.

“People are really starting to appreciate things that show the hand of the maker, like ceramics, tiles, woven textiles, plaster walls with visible brushstrokes, or metalwork with imperfect patina,” Bengtson observes.

“Those kinds of details add warmth and soul to spaces. More and more, homeowners want pieces that feel personal and crafted just for them, even if it means waiting a little longer to thrift the perfect piece, or for others, simply spending a bit more.”

She notes that this appreciation is carrying over into architecture. “Custom trimmed walls, ceiling medallions or simply painting existing trim to emphasize it can completely change how a room feels. More intentional. More crafted. A little more timeless.”

Materials are shifting, too. “We are seeing more tactile choices like travertine, limestone and soapstone instead of high-gloss marble; oiled or raw woods instead of shiny, lacquered finishes; and unpolished metals like bronze or aged brass,” Bengtson adds. “Natural fibers like linen, wool and jute are also still big.”

WHY BUYERS ARE CRAVING CRAFT

Buyers are slowing down for homes that feel personal and one-of-a-kind, with spaces that offer more than just visual appeal. Handcrafted details bring a sense of permanence in a world where so much feels temporary. Luxury is evolving.

Buyers are drawn to thoughtful design over sheer scale. A custom oak banister, an artisanal tile backsplash or a beautifully chosen light fixture can make a home feel richer and more personal.

There is also a growing connection between craftsmanship and sustainability. Local materials, reclaimed wood and eco-conscious artisanship matter. Buyers are not just admiring the finish. They are connecting with the story behind it.

WHAT BUYERS WILL PAY FOR

The details are not going unnoticed. Buyers are willing to invest in craftsmanship. Seventy-two percent of buyers say they would pay more for built-in shelving, and 69% say the same for custom lighting¹. Intricate stonework comes in at 60%, designer doors at 58%, unique tile patterns at 57%, and handcrafted hardware at 55%¹.

The same sentiment shows up when buyers talk about what adds value. Almost nine in 10 say natural materials like wood, stone and metal make a home stand out¹. A large majority also point to craftsmanship as a key factor, with 84% highlighting custom millwork, 83% citing artisanal tile and stone, and 81% mentioning statement lighting and hardware¹. These finishing touches reflect care and craftsmanship, shaping how buyers emotionally connect with a home.





THE AGENT VIEW ON QUALITY

Agents see the same trend. Seventy-nine percent say custom millwork and built-ins make buyers perceive a home as higher quality². More than one in two point to statement lighting, artisanal tile or stonework, and natural materials as details that make a lasting impression². Close to half also mention the impact of unique hardware and doors².

These details do more than create a beautiful space. They can influence price. Nearly half of agents say their clients are willing to pay up to 10% more for homes with artisan or custom features. Craftsmanship has become more than a design choice. It has become a value driver that is both practical and emotional.

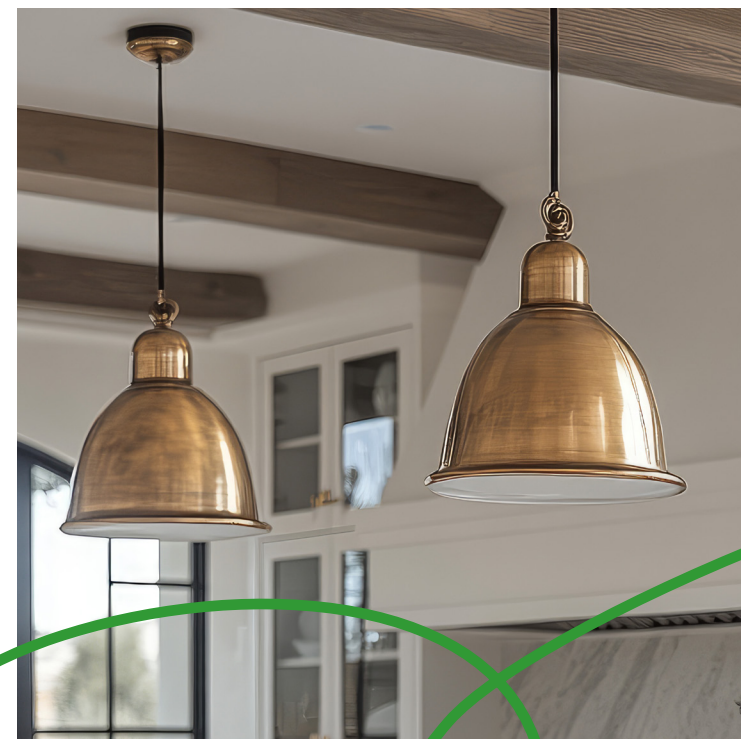
WHEN SMART MEETS CRAFT

Craftsmanship and technology are not opposites. Together, they create homes that feel timeless and ready for the future. “Smart homes with security cameras, adjustable thermostats via app and built-in speaker systems are becoming must-haves for younger buyers,” says Silver. “Given rising temperatures in most cities, inexpensive cooling systems and passive energy are also becoming more important.” Pairing artisan finishes with smart tech gives buyers the best of both worlds.

BUYER-APPROVED CRAFTSMANSHIP

A little craftsmanship goes a long way. These are the details buyers remember long after they’ve left the showing:

- Built-in shelving and custom lighting
- Natural materials like wood, stone and metal
- Custom millwork and artisanal tile or stone
- Statement lighting and hardware
- Designer doors, unique tile patterns and handcrafted details





Trend 6 Love at First Sight

CURB APPEAL 2.0: SERENITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND “WELCOME HOME” IN SECONDS

Buyers often form their first impression before they even reach the front door, and in 2026, that first glance is less about overstuffed flowerbeds and more about quiet confidence. Calm, clean and thoughtfully styled exteriors set the tone for everything that follows, creating a sense of care that instantly invites buyers to imagine life inside.

When a home looks balanced, clean and well cared for, it lowers stress and builds connection. Nearly half of buyers say they will not purchase a home that does not feel right the moment they step inside, and that emotion often begins at the curb¹.

Wellness and sustainability are now part of that first impression. Native plantings, permeable walkways and shaded seating areas are both beautiful and low maintenance, creating a sense of livability and environmental mindfulness. Forward-thinking features like EV-ready garages, energy-efficient lighting and smart locks may not be the first thing buyers notice, but they communicate that a home is both stylish and future ready.

WHAT BUYERS ARE RESPONDING TO

Styled outdoor rooms top the list. Porches and patios with cozy seating and soft lighting instantly read as extra living space. More than three quarters of BHGRE® affiliated agents say these outdoor extensions make the biggest difference in how livable a home feels². A majority of buyers echo that sentiment, describing these spaces as places to unwind at the end of the day¹.

Modern, low-maintenance landscaping comes right behind¹. Neatly mulched beds, native greenery and

drip irrigation signal a home that looks beautiful without demanding constant upkeep.

And then there is the entry. A fresh coat of paint on the front door, crisp house numbers, polished hardware and a simple planter can shift perception in an instant. A well-cared-for entry says the home is loved.

While features like EV chargers and smart locks are gaining traction, buyers still respond most to good design and a warm welcome.

First Impressions That Stick

A warm welcome starts at the curb. These are the details buyers notice first and remember most:





Weaving the Story of Home

From natural light to layered textures and timeless craftsmanship, each element weaves together to shape a space that feels like home.

As Wilcox puts it: “Design helps people imagine what life could look like in a space. When it feels personal and full of possibility, that’s when it resonates.”

These trends remind us that the heart of real estate is not found in square footage or specs. It lives in the spaces that invite people to dream, imagine and belong. **That’s the story of home.**

The 2026 design trends go beyond surface-level choices. They reflect how people want to live and how they want to feel when they walk through the door.





Nobody Knows Homes BetterSM

ABOUT THE DATA

1. This consumer survey was conducted by thinqinsights on behalf of Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate (BHGRE) from October 6 to October 9, 2025. The device-agnostic online survey included 500 U.S. adults aged 21 and older, recruited through a national consumer research panel. Respondents were current or prospective homeowners who were highly involved in home design and renovation decisions. The margin of error for the total sample is ± 4.4 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Qualifying criteria included having purchased a home within the past two years or planning to purchase one within the next two years, or having completed a major home renovation in the past two years or planning one within the next two years.

2. Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate (BHGRE) conducted a proprietary survey in October 2025 to gather insights from affiliated agents. The questionnaire was completed by 343 BHGRE real estate professionals across the United States. Responses were analyzed in aggregate to provide a national snapshot of professional perspectives from agents actively engaged in home buying and selling.

3. References to third-party products, including but not limited to Farrow & Ball Kakelugn No. 317, Benjamin Moore Seaview 836, Sherwin-Williams Sleepy Hollow SW 9145, Farrow & Ball Green Blue No. 84, Benjamin Moore Scenic Drive 697, Sherwin-Williams Forever Green SW 9653, Farrow & Ball Templeton Pink No. 303, Benjamin Moore Burlap 2163-50, Sherwin-Williams Mellow Mauve SW 0039, Farrow & Ball Purbeck Stone No. 275, Benjamin Moore Shale 861, Sherwin-Williams Colonnade Gray SW 7641, Farrow & Ball Down Pipe No. 26, Benjamin Moore Anchor Gray 2126-30, Sherwin-Williams Granite Peak SW 6250, Farrow & Ball Stiffkey Blue No. 281, Benjamin Moore Stunning 826, and Sherwin-Williams Salty Dog SW 9177, are included for informational purposes only and do not imply any affiliation, endorsement, or partnership. All trademarks, product names, and brand references are the property of their respective owners. The insights presented in this report are based on independent consumer survey data and do not reflect the views or opinions of the referenced brands.

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