

the year ahead



realtors on call

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guest columnist

What's new in homes for 2010?

EVERY YEAR the housing industry looks forward to its annual showcase event, the International Builders Show.

The 2010 event, held in Las Vegas earlier this winter, brought together more than 60,000 attendees, miles of exhibitors and four days of educational seminars.

Here are some highlights:

Green building

While first-cost considerations will continue to slow the penetration of green-building techniques to the broader housing market in this economy, it's evident that many elements of green building

are here to stay.

Since going "all in" can be a costly proposition, the focus seems to remain in a few key areas:

• HVAC – Better and more-efficient equipment means not only lower energy bills but a calculable "payback" on investment, something most products don't offer.

• Thermal shell – Whether it's using an advanced product like insulated concrete forms or simply paying attention to the sealing of holes during construction, a tighter shell requires smaller HVAC equipment and offers better comfort and lower energy costs.

• Flooring – Whether exotic Brazilian hardwood or simple-yet-functional bamboo, flooring from renewable and sustainable sources like these remains a key upgrade in most buyer's homes as more and more buyers move away

from carpet.

• Appliances – While the government continues to raise the bar on the base level of efficiency, manufacturers have responded with better, cost-saving appliances and have morphed their functional products into a design treasure trove.

Laundry rooms are the newest rage, and washers and dryers have broken away from the mundane white into reds, blues and stainless finishes. Front loaders minimize the use of water and increase efficiency. Who ever knew doing laundry could be fun?

Indoor-outdoor connection

This area of home design is becoming more and more important.

As housing gets "right-sized" to meet today's budgets, buyers are looking for ways to expand their living space more affordably. In

temperate climates like that we enjoy in Hampton Roads, pavers, Trex decking, pergolas, outdoor kitchens and fire pits enable the season to be extended and the indoor space to expand outdoors.

There's little question that this trend has legs. As acceptance grows and builders start to offer outdoor living packages in buyer's mortgages, this trend should accelerate, and the prices for such enhancements should continue to fall.

Home entertainment

While this category has been "hot" for some time, market acceptance has helped to bring the cost within reach for larger group of buyers.

The nature of challenging economies is that they often drive people to entertain at home. The choices in home entertainment make this a viable option.

While there aren't many new category busters here, the biggest impediment is simply the lightening-fast pace of change. Something new and exciting is always around the corner.

Look for the continuing convergence of computers, televisions

and telephones – all talking to one another in a platform that is quickly growing together.

The face of entertainment is changing with things like On Demand, YouTube and Hulu. The way we watch entertainment is changing as quickly as what we watch. This is definitely a "stay-tuned" topic.

And don't forget ...

The New Homes Council of the Hampton Roads Realtors Association will host its annual New Home Preview at Greenbrier Mall from 10 a.m. 6 p.m. today.

Free and open to the public, the event is a great opportunity to find out about communities all over Hampton Roads without using the gas to drive to each one – and a great opportunity to meet some of the builders using the new products mentioned above.

Terry Gearhart is vice president of sales and marketing with Terry-Peterson Residential Cos. He serves on the executive committee of the Hampton Roads Realtors Association and is instructs courses for its New Homes Council.