

MANSION GLOBAL

Five Checklist Items to Include If You're Building a New Home

Europeans leaving London this time around, Vietnam attracts investors and more news from around the globe

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Dutch Gambrel, the six-bedroom model home at the Barn & Vine properties in Bridgehampton, New York
PHILL LEHANS

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For people who have decided to build rather than buy a new luxury property, the first step—as is the case in all real estate decisions—is to secure the perfect location. While this can mean completely different things depending on the market, good access to transportation and a city center and unobstructed views of whatever the area is known for—whether that's the Empire State Building or Central Park in Manhattan, rolling hills dotted with vineyards or olive groves in Tuscany, or gorgeous sunsets over the Aegean Sea in Mykonos—are usually key.

With location settled, there are a handful of checklist items that experts generally agree every

With that idea in mind, here are five rules to follow if you're building a new home today:

Build a home that fits into its surroundings

Heather Witt, a Los Angeles-based Douglas Elliman broker, sees many developers or individuals building new homes make a mistake from the get-go that can negatively impact resale value: they forget to consider the location in which they're building.

If there is a neighborhood known for its Spanish-style homes, for instance, steer clear of building a big mid-century modern home in the middle of it, she said. "A lot of times people are attracted to a neighborhood for its specific aesthetic," she said. "If you build outside of that aesthetic, you might lower the resale value of your home."

Monique Sofo, the vice president of strategy at Christie's International Real Estate and author of their annual "Luxury Defined" report, added that in addition to staying true to the location, architectural provenance, meaning hiring someone who's going to design a high-quality, timeless home, is also important for the upper echelon of luxury buyers.

"They see buying a home designed by an acclaimed architect as an opportunity to own an architectural collectible, and live in a piece of art," she said.

In many second-home markets in Europe, like the south of France, Tuscany, Venice and the Greek Islands, it's often not possible to build completely new, so buyers instead purchase old properties and then refurbish them. But this rule applies to the renovation process, too, experts say.

"You want to retain a structure's unique features," said Lynne Davie, a broker with Beauchamp Estates, who sells properties in Florence and Tuscany, "and never want to take away its sense of place."

In Tuscany, where there are a lot of classic farmhouses, that means restoring the exterior and interior stone features, and when possible, keeping the original beams in the ceiling, the wood burning oven in the kitchen, and terracotta on floors and walls. "As soon as you start changing these things," she said, "you take the heart out of the property."

Wire the property to accommodate smart home technology

Regardless of the location, every buyer wants a solid WiFi connection throughout their home, whether that's a large London flat or a sprawling Greek villa. Most buyers are also going to want to take advantage of some smart home features, so it's best to include that wiring from the start, experts say.

In Manhattan, Douglas Elliman broker Frances Katzen said buyers expect a fully wired home in which there are built-in speakers and a system where they can play their music from an iPhone or other mobile device; cameras and other security features that they can turn on and off and manage remotely; a Nest thermostat to manage heating and cooling, plus the ability to control blinds, the media center and other features with the touch of a finger.

Jane Gol, the president of Continental Ventures and Continental Pinewood, who is co-developing the Barn & Vine properties in Bridgehampton, New York, calls what most buyers want an “expandable smart home,” meaning one that is wired for today’s systems, but able to adapt as technology evolves.

In London, the head of residential development at Knight Frank, Ian Marris, agreed that while wiring for integrated systems is an essential feature to include when building a new property, including an overly sophisticated system is not. “The system itself needs to be simple enough for the occupant to use it,” Mr. Marris said.

In more remote, second-home destinations, total smart home wiring might not be possible—and its absence is not often a deal breaker, said Mirka Mikleticova, a sales negotiator with Beauchamp Estates in the south of France. But for some of her international clients, specifically those from Russia and the Middle East, lack of intelligent security systems is. “Security is a huge selling point,” she said.

Create flexible and inviting indoor and outdoor entertaining space

Experts in every market stressed the importance of building great entertainment spaces both inside and outside the home. In some places, maintaining a natural flow between the two, is also considered an essential.

For indoor entertainment spaces, experts recommend that new homes have more social and open entertainment spaces throughout the home that are multi-functional and dual purpose in nature. For instance, instead of putting in a home theater or media room, Ms. Gol prefers leaving that space open and comfortable, with oversize sofas, game tables, and a large screen TV. “You want to make this space adaptable and flexible for different users,” she said.

Ms. Witt agreed, noting that she’d rather see a den you can convert to a media room, rather than a single purpose space that might only be used once a month. “If you find more than one use for the space, you’ll appeal to more buyers,” she said.

Kitchens should also be built to as a more social meeting place, Mr. Marris said, with an island unit that is clear, and able to be used as an eating space, or somewhere to meet around with cocktails. “The idea is to go practical and functional,” he said.

In the Hamptons in New York, a second-home destination, Ms. Gol prefers to build properties with a seamless transition from the indoor to outdoor living and entertaining space, she said, with expansive patio areas where people can recreate living and dining outdoors outside. In her newest properties, she's even including underfloor heating in the outdoor patio area to provide that warm invite to get people to linger outside comfortably, even on chilly evenings.

In Mykonos, where most buyers purchase sprawling vacation villas that they refurbish, Roi Deldimou of Beauchamp Estates said that the more livable outdoor space there is, the better. That's because poolside, on an outdoor terrace with views of the sea, is where people spend most of their day.



Outdoor space of Villa Daloli in Mykonos, Greece
Beauchamp Estates

In Cannes, where water views are also prized, large terraces are often created for al fresco dinners, which then flow towards the swimming pool and garden. “A lot of people would sacrifice bedroom space for the entertaining areas,” Ms. Mikleticova said. “Indoor and outdoor entertaining space is really a huge selling point.”

Go high-end yet classic in the kitchen and bathrooms

People will always care about the kitchen and bathrooms when they’re buying a home, which is why it likely pays to take care when choosing appliances and finishes for a new build.

In the kitchen, appliances in a luxury property should be top of the line, Ms. Katzen said. In Manhattan, a Viking range and Sub-Zero refrigerator are expected, while a La Cornue range is currently considered the *crème de la crème*, she said. “People want name brands that show luxury and identify their home as high end,” she said. “Labels make that identification.”

Then, the design must meld with the high-end appliances, she said, and when you’re considering resale potential, “classic is best.”

In bathrooms, two sinks, a bathtub and a separate shower is the preferred set-up to retain value, Ms. Katzen said.

While classic is also preferred in renovated properties in classic structures, kitchens and bathrooms are two places where those overseeing the project should consider introducing contemporary appliances and a more contemporary look.

Consider different families and their lifestyles when you build

Several experts mentioned that one way to ensure a solid resale value on a new build is to think about the needs of the future buyer when it comes to their family make up.

Ms. Adomatis noted that blended families are common, with step-siblings living together under the same roof, but many houses don’t accommodate their needs. She recommended separating the bedrooms a bit so that they’re not only in one area of the house, plus adding a second master suite downstairs, which could comfortably accommodate an aging parent or an older child who returns after college.

Ms. Witt agreed. “You want to build a space that appeals to different lifestyles,” she said, “and works for the most buyers possible.”

Ms. Gol added that this extra master suite is also a must for guests, which are common in second-home markets.

“The first-floor master bedroom gives owners more flexibility,” she said. “It’s almost like having a guest house, but within your home.”