

REDEFINING THE SKITOWN HOME

NEW HOUSING MODELS OFFER UNIQUE
CHOICES FOR LOW-MAINTENANCE LIVING



PHOTOS DAN TULLOS

BY SOPHIE DINGLE

Bigger isn't necessarily better and sometimes less is more. In recent years, these perspectives have begun to infiltrate our thinking. One area where this is manifested quite clearly is the housing market. Many people want to buy and build smaller, more efficient homes. They've begun to downsize and it's not just retirees; it's single people, families or those looking to purchase a second home. The trend is shifting so that people want quality over quantity. For many, it's more important to have an efficient, well-built house that reflects the owner's savviness and taste.

In recent years, we are starting to see a shift in that many people don't want a large home to maintain and care for. This can be seen right here in Steamboat, a resort vacation town, where many homes are second homes. It

seems a buyer of a new home has two options: a large home or a small condo or townhouse. However, many potential buyers balk at the thought of sharing a wall with someone.

Enter Steamboat's third option: homes with the privacy of a single-family unit but the size and low maintenance of a townhome. New developments such as Flat Tops at Wildhorse Meadows offer homes with a smaller footprint which solve the problem of wanting a smaller space but with more freedom than in a shared unit. The community is comprised of 21 lots (currently ten have been sold and four are available in the current offering). The buyer chooses their lot and builds a semi-customizable house. The catch is the size: all the homes are 2,400 to 3,300 square feet. And while this may be on the larger size for some areas, in Steamboat, for a single-family home, it's smaller.





Kerry Shea, who is the listing agent with Ascent Real Estate, explained, “When we took a look at buying trends, we saw that people want lower maintenance. They don’t want a 7,000 square foot home, with lots of acreage to take care of. Here, there is no extra stuff to worry about. You essentially have the merits of a townhome without the shared wall.”

This fact alone was key to several of the buyers, including Brian Becker, who purchased his house in 2017.

“Sharing a wall would not be a possibility for me. My hobby is home theater; I couldn’t have someone knocking on my door all the time, telling me to turn my movie down. That would drive me nuts.”

Mr. Becker plans to retire in a few months and move to his house in Steamboat full time next year. Like many buyers, he chose Flat Tops based on its proximity to the mountain, the fact that it’s not a condo and for its size.

“The size of the home forces you to think about getting rid of stuff and be more realistic about what you want to have in your life,” he says. “As you get older, you start realizing that this or that isn’t important anymore. It’s about getting down to the basics of what makes you happy.”

Another trend relevant to Steamboat is the desire to spend more time in vacation locations.



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Eric Smith, the head architect for the Flat Tops project, explains that longer stays were a key component in the design of these houses.

“More buyers of second homes want to spend the whole summer somewhere, not just go for a week at a time. We were seeing people use their units more and rent them out less.”

While some condos and townhomes often feel like second homes, free-standing houses tend to feel like more “planted” homes rather than vacation spots. The biggest issue is how to make them functional while still utilizing all the space necessary.

Homes in this development illustrate this perfectly.

Each home, though smaller than a traditional single-family home in Steamboat, is completely functional through different elements of design. They are equipped with mudrooms and laundry rooms. The kitchen has a folding glass door that is essentially the length of one wall. When opened, it has the effect of expanding the kitchen into a much larger space so that guests or family can spill to the outside deck. Even the closet doors reflect the need to preserve space. They are barn-style, so they slide open and shut rather than opening out and taking up room in a bedroom.





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These design elements were the reason that Mike Barrett purchased his home last year.

“The indoor/outdoor living space was a huge factor for us,” Mr. Barrett says. “It’s Steamboat, so we wanted to be outside. The efficiency of the design and the layout was also key.”

The Barretts have three daughters so having separate rooms for the mudroom and laundry room was important for them with kids.

“Ours is a three bedroom but thanks to the efficient design of the house, we were able to put two sets of bunkbeds in one of the bedrooms. The kids can be in there, then we have the master and we still have an extra guest room for when we have friends or family come up.”

Due to architectural tricks, the homes are meant to feel bigger than 3,000 square feet.

“We evaluated all aspects of the home, including elements like maximizing ceiling heights,” Shea explains, “to provide more open and inviting spaces.” Indeed, the ceilings in the living room, which is on the main floor, are high enough to make the room feel large and airy.

Windows were another area of focus; we programmed them [windows] in preferential locations and sizes to provide a great source of natural light and attractive views while taking privacy into consideration.”

The interior aspects of the home are very well thought out. “We tried to do everything pretty basic with clean lines,” Charlotte Thomas of Yampa Valley Designs explains. “Nothing is too over the top. If a buyer chooses the modern package, it’s not overly modern; likewise, the rustic package is not too rustic. There’s also the option to mix and match different elements. That concept is pretty unique because technically these aren’t custom homes but yet they’re completely customizable.”

Ms. Thomas chose materials such as porcelain and ceramic



that don’t require a lot of maintenance. Even the hardwood floors were chosen because they will hold up through the years.

Outside of the homes, amenities are important to the buyers as well. Buyers of this trend often want a little extra though not necessarily in the size of their home. Location, conveniences of a gym, hot tub, or easy access to their favorite activities are very important.

This was a key factor for Kelly Keefer who is a full-time resident.

“The amenities at Trailhead Lodge as well as the proximity to work and play are just a few of the reasons I love living here,” Keefer says. “I had been looking for several years for a single-family home in Steamboat and hadn’t found the right option yet. Most of the downtown homes were very old and I didn’t want to worry about repairs and maintenance. When I toured my home, I completely fell in love.”

Ms. Keefer isn’t the only one – people everywhere are starting to see that they don’t need or want a lot of extra space to accomplish what they’re looking for. This new trend can be summed up by these four words; simple, modern, location and wow. **HL**

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