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** Note from the Publisher: I am pleased to introduce our newest monthly column to Professional Building Review. This Interior Design and Model Merchandising column will be written by Innovative Spaces' team of designers who are experienced and approachable. I think they will be a knowledgeable addition to our publication.*

Model Merchandisers Can Provide Valuable Insights Early On

For builders and architects, a simple and affordable way to increase the value of your homes in any new community is to involve your model merchandiser right from the beginning at the planning stage.

We have found that by working closely with our builders and their architects at the earliest of stages, we can carefully advise on various aspects of the new property build that are advantageous to the overall look, feel and flow of the home.

A model merchandiser can easily lend their expertise and assistance in several areas, including: understanding your buyer profile, discussing your marketing strategy, reviewing floor and space plans, advising on color schemes, and strategizing on cost-effective measures to save on your bottom-line budget. Getting these crucial aspects right from the beginning is the key to how your house will ultimately present itself to visitors and prospective buyers.

An architect and a builder can do more service for the buyer and the sale of their new homes by investing in a strong, experienced designer who can give them a space planning critique. This critique will point out any structural, spatial, or architectural challenges that may present certain difficulties in design layout and functionality, including: is there a bedroom wall long enough for a space-saving dresser, does the television compliment the position of the sofa, are the doorways wide enough to allow room for interesting, over-sized pieces of furniture, and does the space feel comfortable and inviting.

We have come across satisfied architects and builders who have benefited from this kind of input and who attest to the simplicity of the overall process. Some builders always consult with a designer before proceeding to the next stage due to the valuable feedback and insights their designers can give to specifically targeting their consumers. The principals of Century Communities have been in the building industry for over 20 years. Innovative Spaces is fortunate to have been their model merchandiser for Renaissance and Bluffmont Estates at RidgeGate in Lone Tree and Highlands at Westbury in Westminster. Rick Roedel, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Century Communities explains, "When you trust the feedback you are receiving from your interior designer or model home merchandiser, you automatically gain the perspective of the buyer. We had some interesting design opportunities with our new town home models. By integrating the strategic concepts given to us at the planning stage, we proceeded with the confidence that our marketing goals were going to be demonstrated and accomplished."

When a potential buyer walks into a new showcase model home, they look for livability that makes sense for their family and their lifestyle. They look for comfort, ease of movement and flow between the rooms, functionality and structure of space, room positioning and architectural uniqueness. How the buyer experiences this walk-through can be the difference between loving it

or leaving it. It proves beneficial to merchandise your model. Spec homes that are not designed may actually hurt your overall sales as people cannot easily visualize how they fit into a space without familiar furnishings. Your model merchandiser plays a key role in how these elements come together to create true harmony and interest so that the buyer can pay attention to all the unique details of the house. A professional designer can select the appropriate quality finishes, tile, carpeting, hardwood flooring, and countertops. This is a valuable, time and money saving tool for a builder who doesn't have the expertise or vision to put all of these components together.

You may fall into the category of builders who feel they can't afford a model merchandiser or who has the extra budget to properly design their model homes. By consulting and utilizing an experienced model merchandiser, most builders surprisingly find they do have the resources to showcase their homes - saving them money in the front end while profiting through final home sales. Many builders feel they can go out and purchase all of the furnishings they need - merchandising the models themselves. They believe that this is the easiest and most cost effective way. However, this approach usually ends up costing more due to retail price mark-ups on furniture and accessories. Additionally, the model can look unsophisticated or unfinished because crucial attention to color, finishes and details were overlooked.

The true builder benefit is that a model merchandiser utilizes their wholesale discounts and personal relationships to offset most expenses, putting the extra savings back into the budget or into a fuller finished look. You don't have to spend \$40 a square foot to impress the buyer. Average costs for a good model merchandiser can range anywhere from \$19 up to \$30 per square foot. However, there is a price range for every builder and most model merchandisers are creative enough to work within the parameters of any budget. However, we would caution that there needs to be a clear understanding of design expectations for anything lower than \$19 per square foot.

If done well, the result can easily be a home that looks and feels substantially more expensive than what was actually spent; additionally, the builder may end up profiting more for their homes due to the higher quality perception. Therefore, the foresight to establish this relationship in the beginning will be clearly evident to your bottom-line. Utilize the talents and expertise of a model merchandiser to specifically understand and cater to the buyer's demographic profile. This will not only prove worthwhile in terms of time, money and perspective, but will also result in more homes sold as a final testament to a successful architect, builder, model merchandiser partnership.

Innovative Spaces – Interior Merchandising and Design: R-L: Kristin Hibler, President; Lori Tice, Designer; and Jamie Rumph, Designer are an experienced professional design team that have been collectively helping design model and residential homes in Colorado and the Western Region for over 15 years. Innovative Spaces is the only Colorado interior design company to have their own merchandise warehouse which further offsets the cost for shipping and handling of interior merchandise. Innovative Spaces can easily be reached at 303-901-4777 or at www.innovativespaces.com

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