



BDC

S P R I N G 2 0 0 7

BUILDER DESIGN CENTER MAGAZINE

Boutique Design

MERCHANDISING IN SMALLER SPACES

BY JAIMI JULIAN THOMPSON

For a variety of reasons, such as the shifts in the new home market, the high overhead of some locations or strategic priorities, many new home builders choose to go the route of a smaller design center. The good news is the opportunities those smaller centers can offer for both designers and homebuyers by finding ways to create a boutique design experience for their homebuyers with smaller, creative studios.

THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

Marketing researchers estimate that we, as consumers, are bombarded with an average of 5,000 marketing messages a day. There are more marketing vehicles than ever – and more options than ever. As consumers, we have become experts

at blocking and filtering. Marketers are increasingly challenged to find ways to reach us. When it is time to make our selections, we have so much information – and disinformation – at our fingertips and so many choices that we often find it easier to put off making a choice.

TIP 1: BUILDING A BOUTIQUE DESIGN EXPERIENCE

Increasingly, consumers are choosing the boutique experience in everything from retail to selecting a hotel. As a reprieve from information overload, less is truly more. That approach can translate to new home design centers; homebuyers

appreciate it when the hard work of culling the wheat from the chaff has been done for them. The 80/20 rule – that 80 percent of your sales come from 20 percent of your products – still holds true, and is a great starting point for defining your offering in limited spaces.

Have your supplier partners give you reports on their top ten sellers for your area in each product type. Supplement that with a handful of new fashion items and products catering to the demographics of your different communities.

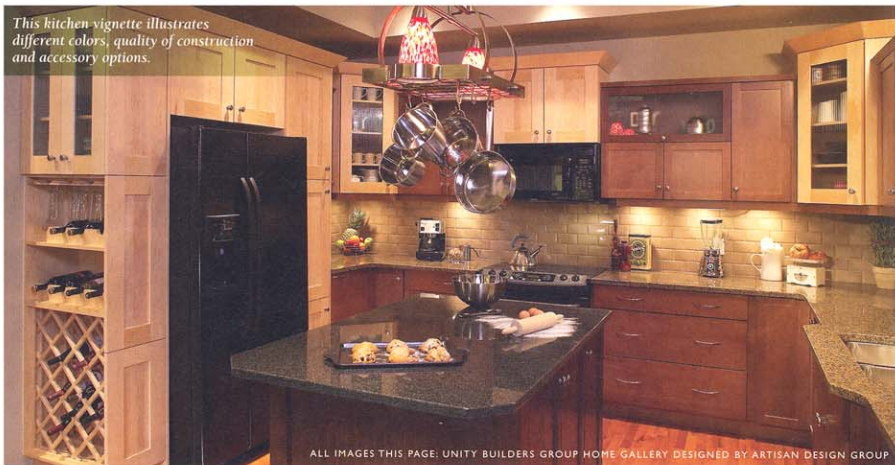
TIP 2: ASSISTING HOMEBUYER VISUALIZATION

The biggest challenge for new homebuyers is not being able to visualize their selections in a real environment, but that doesn't mean that building twenty kitchen vignettes is effective or practical. Even if it were, it would not show all of the possible options and unlimited combinations, and it would



When merchandising small spaces, every inch needs to be utilized, from carpet and glass tiles as art to the receptionist desk doubling as a cabinet display.

This kitchen vignette illustrates different colors, quality of construction and accessory options.



ALL IMAGES THIS PAGE: UNITY BUILDERS GROUP HOME GALLERY DESIGNED BY ARTISAN DESIGN GROUP

overwhelm the customer.

With a few small vignettes, homebuyers are able to view design concepts, specialty options and construction features; with models, virtual models, and room scenes, they can visualize theme and color combinations and then with actual samples they can verify actual colors, stain, and finishes.

TIP 3: PERSONALIZED DESIGN SERVICE

Now more than ever, knowledgeable design consultants are critical to conveying information to customers in a manner that is simple, visual and unique. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the number of choices, and it is quantitatively impossible to learn absolutely everything about every option. But

if the homebuyers trust the person they are working with and believe the designer knows what he or she is talking about, they will be comfortable with their purchase decision.

By creating design concept boards reflecting different themes and color palettes, clients will be able to identify what they are drawn to, enabling designers to understand the feeling and style they are looking to evoke in their home.

Culling your offerings, creating efficient vignettes to sell the concept versus color, using creative display and design concepts and providing professional design guidance are the keys to maximizing your merchandising in smaller studio environments. ■

Jaimi Julian Thompson is Founder and President of Artisan Design Group and a twenty-year veteran of the new home design center industry. Artisan Design Group is a national design center consulting firm that offers a full range of professional development programs, showroom design and merchandising, as well as sales and operations strategies for the new residential sector. She may be contacted at Jaimi@ArtisanDesignGroup.net.



This single bath display features three cabinet & hardware combinations, two sets of plumbing hardware and two lighting systems.

This cabinet/countertop sample display shows finishes, styles, materials and edge treatments in a very compact space.