

National Home Builders Association Reports on What Buyers Want in a New Home

In a February 14 release, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) reported that the emergence of Covid-19 and mortgage interest rate fluctuations has resulted in homebuyers sacrificing features for affordability. Buyers have also changed the features which they prioritize.

The NAHB reported that the size of new homes increased in 2021 as a reflection of the pandemic's increase in work-at-home and remote schooling space requirements, but that house sizes fell slightly in 2022, as did the demand for three or more full bathrooms and 3-car or larger garages.

The organization predicts that home sizes will increase this year because of a predominance of wealthy buyers less affected than other buyers by the increase in mortgage rates, but that will change in 2024, if mortgage rates moderate and more buyers reenter the market.

"Home buyers are looking more and more to their homes to provide

a sense of well-being," observed Donald Ruthroff, AIA, founding principal at Design Story Spaces LLC. "They want their homes to support their day-to-day health — physically, emotionally, and mentally," as quoted in the NAHB release.

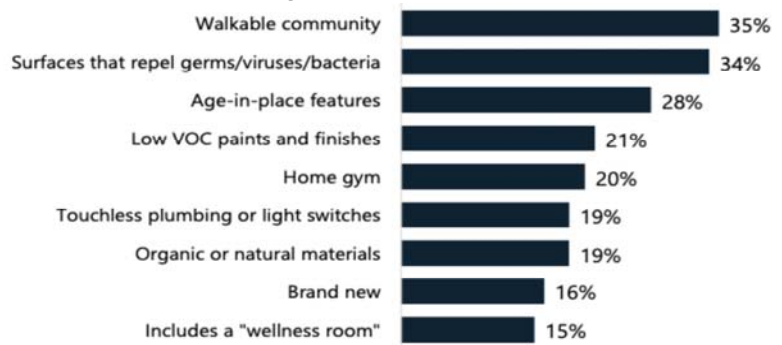
At right is a chart showing the results of an October 2020 survey of 1,240 respondents by John Burns Real Estate Consulting, LLC. The answers were in response to the question, "*Which of the following would you require of a home for you to consider it a healthy home.*"

Given that the survey was done only six months into the pandemic, it's not surprising how many responses related to a healthy environment and lifestyle. The survey was done long before the recent brouhaha over the health effects of natural gas cooking and heating, or I would expect "all-electric home" or "no natural gas" to have been among the choices offered to respondents.

(and our present) of which we may have been less aware. I'm thinking of books like *The 1619 Project* and *Caste*, which taught me things I did not know about our nation's sad legacy of enslavement and racism, which are at the heart of America's "great experiment." For example, I didn't realize that the 13th amendment abolished slavery, "*except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*," an exception that was exploited throughout the former confederate states by convicting Blacks of petty or false crimes and imprisoning them so that the prisons could lease them to plantation owners to continue their enslavement.

Yes, I'm awake to many aspects of our history to which the MAGA mob is (and would like to remain) unconscious. I'm awake to the environmental injustice suffered by the minority communities close to the Suncor plant in north Denver, which was the topic of a CEFF film. I'm awake to the broken promise of "40 Acres and a Mule" which underlies the calls for reparations to descendants of the enslaved.

I prefer "woke" to "unconscious."



The survey results were included in a research report from the New Home Trends Institute.

The release also described a trend toward "biophilic design," a term that I had not seen previously. Basically, it refers to a preference for natural materials and environment. Lots of natural light and real wood finishes would contribute to such a feeling. It has been demonstrated that exposure to nature and natural home design reduces stress.

In November, 2022, the University of Maine unveiled its 600-sq.-ft. "Bio3D" home made using forest-derived cellulose nano fiber (CNF) technology to 3D print the floor, walls and roof. These modules were then assembled at a site on the UMaine campus. It is a "biophilic" alternative to the concrete 3D-printed homes which I featured in my Nov. 5, 2020, and Dec. 15, 2022, columns, available online at www.JimSmithColumns.com.

The site ConstructUtopia.com, in a January 2021 article clearly influenced by the pandemic, listed "4 healthy home features that home buyers care about":

1) **Good indoor air quality.** This is especially needed in a well-insulated/air tight home, where a suitable appliance would be a Conditioned Energy Recovery Ventilator (CERV), which I wrote about in my Feb. 9, 2023, column.

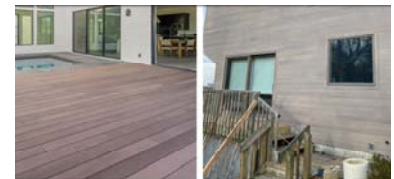
2) **Quiet, soothing bedrooms.** The report suggested "thoughtful lighting, better soundproofing" and

a nearby "snore room" for the offending or the suffering partner.

3) **Easy-to-clean surfaces.**

4) **Outdoor recreation areas.** Over three-quarters of survey respondents said they were focusing more on their physical health, and nearly as many (69%) said they're focusing on their mental health. Exercise addresses both needs.

A September 2022 article on the same website featured a Mississippi company called **Modern Mill** which uses discarded rice husks to create a wood-alternative building material called "Acre" because one pallet of the product reportedly saves one acre of rainforest. Rice is a major agricultural product in the South, and rice husks would otherwise go to a landfill. Here are a couple pictures of the Acre product used as decking and siding, which, like real wood, can be stained:



NAHB reports a big jump this year in the demand for exterior amenities such as patios, decks and porches. Outdoor kitchens weren't mentioned but could have been, from my own observation.

Home offices also appeared on the list of most wanted features for the first time this year, again a result of the pandemic.

Film Festival Expanded My 'Woke' Credentials, But That's a Good Thing — Better Than 'Unconscious'

I'm writing this column in the immediate aftermath of attending the **Colorado Environmental Film Festival**. I was only able to watch 20 or so of the 90-plus films featured during the sixteen 2-hour sessions, but I plan to watch others this week. (You can access all the films at www.CEFF.net for \$75, which gives you seven days to view any collection you log into by Sunday, March 5.)

My favorite films were: **The Sacrifice Zone**; **Wings over Water**; **Heart of Maui**; **Somehow Hopeful**; **Earth Girl**; **The Witness Is a Whale**; and **A Rally for Rangers**.

Many of these films raised my consciousness regarding different issues facing humanity and America, which got me thinking about the term "**Woke**," which is applied negatively against those of us with similar awareness of certain issues. In the parlance of the MAGA folks, I'm part of the "Woke mob."

Obviously, the term is adapted from "awake" or "awakened." One thing for which we can thank the previous administration is that the division it spawned awakened people like me to portions of our history

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