

Landmark Design

An extraordinary level of authenticity defines community.

By Larry Delpit, Jr.

I was asked to write this column for Builder and Developer shortly after the national tragedy on September 11. Like everyone else in America, my thoughts have been occupied with those affected by the terrorist attacks and the changes that happened in our country overnight as a result.

As I talk with colleagues within the real estate development industry about not only the attacks but the ensuing campaign against terrorism, insights have begun to emerge as to how our industry is being impacted. Reports indicate that though there may be a slight slow down, the housing market in California is expected to remain strong throughout next year. That is primarily true because the state still has a severe housing shortage, but there may be some truth to the idea that investing in real estate makes people feel a bit more grounded, as some industry experts have suggested recently.

However, what I have found most fascinating in discussing the current market with real estate peers, is the sudden trend among California homebuyers, normally a transient group, to look for roots and a sense of connection. Colleagues have told me that attendance at broker and homeowner association events has increased exponentially as the desire to come together as a community increases.

Recent comments from visitors to our new home enclave MonteVerde in Tarzana, California indicate a yearning to live in a place that provides a sense of history and community.

I believe we have achieved that at MonteVerde by the way the community was planned to evoke the feeling of a naturally formed neighborhood and by the authentic design of the homes themselves.

When we first conceived the idea for MonteVerde, our concept was to design upscale homes that reflected Southern California's heritage. We knew that the most important decision we would make was to select the right architect, one with a strong background in authentic traditional design, which is rare. Particularly in times of economic slow downs, the design of an upscale home is critical because the exceptional projects are the ones that will be successful.

We chose Los Angeles-based John Andrews Group because of the firm's more than 20 years of experience in designing elegant homes with

exceptional attention to detail and history. One of the company's most renowned projects was the multimillion-dollar restoration of the landmark Pickfair Estate in Beverly Hills.

We also engaged Santa Barbara-based architect Robert P. Senn as a consultant to the project for his knowledge and expertise in early Southern California architecture, particularly the Spanish Revival movement, as exemplified by the prestigious estate homes he has designed in the Santa Barbara and Montecito areas.

Today's homebuyers are more aware of authentic design and have tired of the generic Mediterranean styles that have dominated Southern California architecture for many years. Upscale buyers, in particular, are well traveled and educated and regularly read architectural and design magazines. They know the difference between an authentic design and one that misses the mark. And, they are more impressed with simple elegance than showy, ostentatious designs.

Simplicity and elegance are the earmarks of Spanish Revival architecture, the style of design we chose for MonteVerde. The Spanish Revival movement was established in Southern California in the 1910s and was practiced through the 1930s by such renowned architects as George Washington Smith and Wallace Neff. It was a period that gave birth to some of the most exquisite and classic home designs, which looked to Europe for historical roots and a sense of poetry and romance.

Spanish Revival architecture is defined by purity of line, a strong sense of mass, use of arches, courtyards, plain wall surfaces and tile roofs, all inspired from the Mediterranean world, as well as late forms of Moorish, medieval Spanish and Italian church architecture.

Using these themes as the precedent for the design of MonteVerde, we designed homes of proportion and simplicity with the authentic elements that achieve a feeling of history and intimacy.

One of the most critical elements of Spanish Revival architecture is its use of mass, which we captured by designing homes with exterior walls that measure 14-inch thick at a minimum. We also stayed true to the movement by selecting French casement windows with true divided lite, meaning that each pane is a separate piece of glass, an elegant and rare feature in modern homes. The windows and doors are all wood and highlighted with forged, old-world hardware to give the homes a true European feel.

To create a heightened mark of elegance just where they make the right statement, pre-cast or plaster moldings, cornices and entry surrounds are judiciously used, as are arched interior doors

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and hallways. And beautiful, pre-cast fireplaces, emulating historical stone fireplaces, are designed in multiple rooms of the homes.

But, we felt it was not enough to provide homes of extraordinary character, if the entire community did not follow suit. We wanted to create the feel of a naturally occurring neighborhood, one that would seem formed by the construction of custom homes over a period of time. To achieve that, we have designed a wide choice of home designs and a varied color palette. While the design of the individual homes will complement the neighborhood as a whole, each can have its own unique look.

Homebuyers have responded overwhelmingly to the authentic architectural design and community layout, which define MonteVerde. The neighborhood has struck a cord with buyers who have a heightened awareness of authenticity and exceptional design. MonteVerde just opened this month and already buyer interest and sales have born out our belief that today's homebuyers are looking for a neighborhood that provides a sense of place, history and community.



Larry Delpit Jr. is President of Manhattan Holding Company, a developer of luxury single family residences. For additional information on the company, please call 562.590.8835. For more details about MonteVerde, please visit www.monteverdehomes.com.

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