



INSIDE

■ Texas legend Jim Bowie had quite a life, writes columnist Leon Hale. **PAGE G6**



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Making kids care about architecture and history

“**H**OW many people here know what architects do?” Phil Freelon asked the class.

Only a few hands went up, and I began to worry.

The tall, elegant architect — possibly the most prominent African American in that overwhelmingly white field — was about to give about 50 Ryan Middle School kids a PowerPoint presentation very similar to the one he planned to deliver that evening at the Menil Collection: a presentation about his current Houston project, an ambitious rethinking of Emancipation Park. His plan aims to transform the historic but bedraggled Third Ward park into “a catalyst for local development” and “a national and international destination” — a can’t-miss stop for tourists, a celebration of black culture and maybe the world’s best place to celebrate Juneteenth.

At the Menil, I was sure Freelon wouldn’t stop to explain what architects do. But Ryan Middle School is a long way from the Menil.

It’s a city school so low-performing that last year it was named to Apollo 20, the Houston Independent School District’s worst-of-the-worst turnaround program. Ninety-eight percent of Ryan’s kids are either black or Hispanic; 95 percent qualify for free



LISA GRAY

lunches.

Could Freelon explain to these kids what architecture is?

And if he could, could he make them care?

Black architecture?

These days, Freelon’s name appears occasionally in the national news: He’s one of the architects of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, which will occupy a coveted spot on the National Mall, next to the Washington monument. (One of Freelon’s teammates, the project’s lead designer, is the architectural superstar David Adjaye, a Londoner with Ghanaian parents.)

Simply by existing, the museum raises a vexing question: When is African-American history separate from plain American

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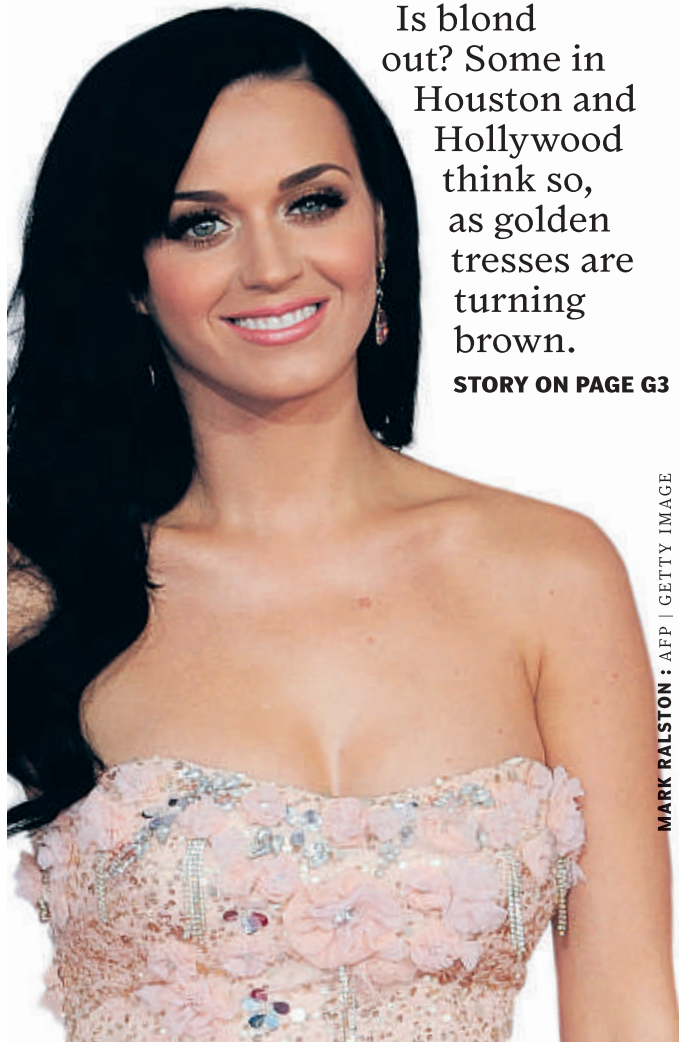
MAYRA BELTRÁN : STAFF

ARCHITECT: Phil Freelon relaxes in Emancipation Park. Freelon recently spoke to students at Ryan Middle School.

The flocks go dark

Is blond out? Some in Houston and Hollywood think so, as golden tresses are turning brown.

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MARK RALSTON : AFP | GETTY IMAGE

FEATHERING THE NEST



NO-FUSS DINING

DON GLENTZER

WHAT MAKES A HOUSE A HOME

WE STILL WANT TO LIVE LARGE, BUT IN LESS SPACE



GRILL TALK

WIRE PHOTO



COOK'S DELIGHT

DON GLENTZER



CLOSET ENVY

WILLIAM T. STUBBS & ASSOC.

ON THE LIST

Here are a few of the amenities that homeowners want:

NO-FUSS DINING

■ For casual lifestyles, a flexible, open kitchen-dining area is a must. Formal dining rooms are gone. This is Carol and Mike Linn’s home in Galveston’s Beachtown development.

COOK'S DELIGHT

■ High-end appliances, a status symbol, aren’t camouflaged — including the wine storage unit. The handmade mesquite table in this home, built by Carol Barden, works as an island, a buffet or for sit-down dining.

GRILL TALK

■ Many families are sacrificing indoor square footage for outdoor entertainment areas, including kitchens with fireplaces — and, sometimes, covered space for a big TV.

CLOSET ENVY

■ Storage is king. New homeowners may forgo a big master bedroom as long as it has a huge master closet.

FOTOLIA

By **MOLLY GLENTZER** and **KATHY HUBER** | STAFF WRITERS

A new nesting season has begun. Amid signs that the economy is recovering, that fickle migratory species known as Homeowner sapiens is fluffing its feathers. Many homeowners are thinking about remodeling or upgrading to new spaces. They’ll have no shortage of decisions to make: At the National Association of Homebuilders’ annual international show last month in Florida, more than 1,100 companies exhibited the latest in appliances, building accessories, construction materials, doors, cabinetry, countertops, windows, home automation systems, energy-saving products and wall and floor products.

But what do people really want in a home now?

We asked a cadre of Houston real estate agents, builders, architects and interior designers what three features top their clients’ lists.

Their answers, consistently, indicate that Houstonians want a casual, comfortable, convenient lifestyle that’s both budget- and environmentally conscious. Here’s how that translates to the spaces we inhabit.

Smaller, smarter rooms

Bigger isn’t better anymore, even if you can afford it.

“All of a sudden, people are looking for compact square footage with rooms that can serve more than one purpose. It’s environmentally friendly and less tax,” said Martha Turner of Martha Turner Properties. “People have realized that all the space in the world isn’t the answer to happiness, nor is it prudent.”

Turner’s business includes the high-end market, where 10,000-square-foot homes are common. In that arena, 5,000 square feet is suddenly desirable.

But smaller, smarter homes also are important to value-conscious buyers, said builder David Weekley of David



FOTOLIA

Weekley Homes.

At any price, people want a home that meets their personal needs. Those needs have changed in the last generation.

Custom builder Kevin Frankel of Frankel Building Group has noticed a 15-percent downsizing in living space in newer homes. But customers want more functionality from their rooms, he said. Rooms need to multitask, just like their owners.

The formal dining room — that sacred space your mother or grandmother set up for holidays or special gatherings — is nearly extinct. Today’s buyers are more likely to want that square footage devoted to a media-filled gathering space. People are more likely to work

Please see **HOMES**, Page G8

HOMES: Buyers are looking for a simpler life

CONTINUED FROM PAGE G1 from home at least some of the time, so home offices are an asset, too.

Carol Isaak Barden, who has built 15 spec homes in the past eight years, said empty-nesters are particularly space-conscious. They're not building bedrooms for children and grandchildren as they might have in the past.

Eric and Vicki Weldon, whose two sons are in college, recently purchased one of Barden's homes after moving from a house about twice the size in Beaumont. They transferred for Vicki Weldon's job. She's Exxon-Mobil's U.S. occupational health manager; he's a retired surgeon.

"We were just trying to have a simpler life, with less stuff," Eric Weldon said. "What attracted us to Carol's house was the warmth of it. We didn't choose it because of its size, but it was a plus."

The 3,234-square foot space accommodates their sons easily on weekends and holidays. "I'm just hoping not to find out how comfortable it will be on a long-term basis," Weldon quipped.

Architects Russell and Rame Hruska of Intexure are at the other end of that cycle, with a 3-year-old son. But they're even more avid about their footprint.

Much of the space in their 3,000-square foot Live-Work Studio near the Museum District serves dual functions; the dedicated "home only" space is just 650 square feet. A downstairs seating area doubles as exhibit space for local artists, for example, and the dining area, with a table that seats up to 14 people, is a work space by day.

Bells and whistles

The smartest room of all these days in many new homes is the kitchen, which Barden calls the center of the universe.

Turner said for her clients, a large, open kitchen-family room is a "must-must-must," with a corner for kids to do their homework and an informal dining area. They also appreciate specialized appliances such as warmer drawers, espresso machines and built-in steamers (the microwave of the 21st century).

Barden thinks the popularity of the Food Network has influenced kitchen design. When Julia Child was on TV, Barden noted, "everyone was buying a copper bowl for whipping egg whites. Now they want big fancy ovens with six burners. A conventional range and a convection oven are mandatory, and some home buyers request two dishwashers."

People may not be so inclined to flash their wealth with a three- or four-car garage, but in the kitchen, high-end ranges by makers such as Wolf and Viking are on many people's must-have lists.

"When I started, the goal was to make these things disappear," said interior designer Bill Stubbs of William W. Stubbs and Associates. Now people want natural stone countertops and to show off commercial-looking appliances.

And plenty of homeowners know how to use them. "People are cooking more, both men and women," said Stubbs' design associate, Phyllis Stepp.

High-end appliances drive up the value of your home. "Many house sales depend on the master bath and kitchen," Stubbs said.

His clients want luxury

baths with free-standing tubs and showers with myriad water features.

Barden said couples with shared baths don't want to share sinks, storage or counter space.

They also want privacy. "Every person who can afford it wants a separate toilet," Turner said. "Water closets are a real premium, even if you have a shared bath."

Frankel said his customers increasingly request a downstairs guest room with bath. Baby boomers like offering overnight guests their own formal space away from family hustle and bustle, he said.

Technology brings another layer of convenience.

"There's no end to the number of TVs people want in the house," Stubbs said. "They slap them up like postage stamps." They also expect integrated technology — Wi-Fi, special lighting and other electronics — woven into the house, "so it's become a part of a designer's and architect's life."

Storage needs have evolved.

Buyers rarely ask for walls of bookshelves anymore, Barden said. But they want their master closets bigger than ever.

That extra-small bedroom converts to provide not only space for clothes and shoes, but a well-lit packing station and a chaise, Stubbs said.

Garage and pantry storage are also important. One of Barden's buyers requested a "Costco closet" for all the household products she buys in bulk.



ENERGY-SAVVY

DON GLENTZER

■ Rame and Russell Hruska's Live-Work Studio is a model of sustainability and energy efficiency. The large windows capture daylight while overhangs keep out direct sun.

Green scene

Energy efficiency is both a budget and environmental issue. Either way, it's high on priority lists.

Weekley said his new homes are 50 percent more efficient than they were five years ago. That's significant, saving up to \$1,200 annually on utility bills. For its high-performance homes, Weekley's company has twice been honored as an Energy Efficiency leader by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Some efficiencies can be luxurious. Designer Sharon Staley, president of the American Society of Interior Designers Texas-Gulf Coast Chapter, says steam and induction ovens and dishwashers with drawers are means to cleaner, more economic living. So are Lutron lighting systems that cut down on electric bills while adding ambience.

The Hruskas have built their architecture business on sustainability. A few years ago, few people understood LEEDS certification (building to meet

stringent environmental standards); now most of her clients do, Rame Hruska said. "They want materials that aren't off-gassing, and people understand all the things that go into energy efficiency."

The Hruskas — urban pioneers in the best sense — live in a model community they've built around a shared greenspace in an area of town that they're helping to revitalize. Its soon-to-be LEED-certified homes — sleek, modern and brimming with natural light — were designed to be as cost-effective as they are energy-smart.

"Green doesn't have to cost more. Building orientation is a huge factor. Window orientation and shading don't cost more money up front but bring huge savings," Rame Hruska said. "We hardly ever turn our lights on during the day." Overhangs keep out the heat of direct sun during warm months.

Features like upgraded insulation cost more up front but reduce energy costs long-term, she said.

"It's surprising how sophisticated buyers have become about environmentally friendly construction. They can talk about solar panels and Icynene insulation with authority. Over a period of time, these things are a great investment, Barden said.

The key phrase is "over time." Barden said a lot of buyers like the idea, but she's not sure they want to pay for such features. Her latest project, a three-bedroom, 3½ bath home on Banks Street designed by Seattle-based architect Richard Sundberg, incorporates Icynene insulation, tankless water heaters, metal air ducts, solid core windows and doors and exterior materials impervious to fire and weather.

Also filled with handcrafted woods, it's priced at more than \$400 a square

foot. The design community has oohed and aahed over it, but a qualified buyer hasn't stepped forward since the house went on the market in late October.

Airing it out

Homebuyers also are looking for green, literally. In many cases, said Frankel, they're trading indoor square footage for large outdoor living spaces.

Outdoor kitchens, pools and fireplaces may seem like a splurge, but the slow economy has contributed to their popularity. Spending more time at home, families want to put their money where it counts. And it's less expensive to build an outdoor kitchen and entertainment space than to renovate one inside.

The ideal space for many includes a covered area for — you guessed it — a flat-screen TV. Families like them as a place to play games like Wii together, Turner said.

"Cost is still big on people's minds," Hruska said. Like the others interviewed for this story, she focuses now on helping clients make informed decisions on ways to stretch their dollars.

Even high-end buyers are favoring tile and wood floors now over carpeting. "They're easier to keep. Wood wears and matures; carpet wears and gets dirty," Turner said. "It's a lot less expensive to replace area rugs than carpet."

Barden says some in the industry expect homes to continue to shrink — because prices and taxes won't. She has one friend, she confided, "who thinks the day will come where people will be able to clean their own houses." (The horror.) The era of the McMansion with a five-car garage is over, she said.

"Of course, a wonderful stock market could change all that."

molly.glentzer@chron.com;
kathy.huber@chron.com

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

MARTHA TURNER: A large, open kitchen-family room is a "must-must-must," with a corner for kids to do their homework and an informal dining area.



COURTESY PHOTO

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COURTESY PHOTO

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JULIE SOEFER

RUSSELL AND RAME HRUSKA: Green doesn't have to cost more. Building orientation is a huge factor.



SPLASHY BATHS

DON GLENTZER

■ Luxury baths with free-standing tubs and large showers are one of the most-requested features in homes today.



MOTHER'S DRESSES



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Dance the afternoon away

By DARCY MILLER
Martha Stewart Weddings Magazine

Q: We're having an afternoon wedding reception. Is it appropriate to have dancing?

A: There are no specific rules of etiquette that discourage dancing during the day. If you and your fiancé love to dance, you can certainly do so at your celebration, regardless of the hour. Just keep in mind that certain types of music are better suited to a midday event.

Consider a jazz or Latin band, or even bluegrass. Pop music is generally loud and more fun to dance to in the evening. Select a reception site that echoes the mood of your music. A historic mansion with a marble floor might inspire romantic waltzes. An open field would be perfect for bluegrass. Lively Cuban music is the perfect match for a brightly decorated poolside veranda.

If you'd like to have a rock band, keep in mind that your guests may feel more timid about dancing in full daylight than they would in the evening. Look for an indoor site that can be made to have a nighttime atmosphere; guests will be more likely to dance in a low-lit room.

If you have your heart set on a large band, be sure to book it far in advance. A band that is popular for evening events may not be available during the afternoon, as daytime and evening events often overlap.

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Pre Valentine's Day Auction

Sunday, Feb. 13th at 1 PM

14463 Luthe Rd. in Houston

This auction will include over 50 Weapons, Rifles, Shotguns, Pistols and Revolvers. \$20 to \$1 Gold Coins, Silver Dollars, Paper Currency, Proof Sets, Mint Sets, 14kt, 18kt Diamond and Gemstone Jewelry to include Rings, Bracelets, Earrings and Watches. Lists will be posted as soon as they become available. Col. Webster #7460. Cash, Cks. CC. Doors open at Noon for viewing.
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www.webstersauction.com