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## Must-have home features of 2006

### Dropped ceilings, awnings, wallpaper fail to make the cut

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By [Tom Kelly](#)  
[Inman News](#)

Nearly three decades ago, hardwood floors were the absolute rage. They were the first home features highlighted by real estate salespersons and the most popular "standard" item builders would include in mid-level construction packages.

Hardwood floors may no longer be on the leading edge of home design but agents say quality and durability will continue to outsell trendy every time in residential real estate.

Mark Nash, a Chicago-based Coldwell Banker broker and real estate author whose book "1001 Tips for Buying & Selling a Home" is a helpful guide for consumers considering the residential market, has compiled a list of what's "in" for housing this year--and what is definitely "out." The list is a result of input from Realtors from around the country who, in turn, have solicited feedback from home buyers and sellers as they visit resale and new homes.

Leading the "out" column has nothing to do with tasteless interiors or boxy exteriors. Topping the chart is any more discussion about a possible housing bubble. Most analysts--including David Lereah, the National Association of Realtors chief economist--concur that no national bubble exists, that any bubbles must be regional, and point to poor local employment figures as the reason. There will be flat appreciation in some areas but sales will remain strong nationally.

Here's a capsule of what is absolutely "out," according to Nash and his Realtor contributors:

- Ebony-stained hardwood floors. You're better off tearing it out than trying to sand the ebony out to refinish.
- Single-rod closets. Buyers want the most storage in the least amount of space. Organizers accomplish this.
- Dark rooms with small windows. Natural light can overrule a variety of other problems in a home.
- Wallpaper. Buyers never have the same taste as decorators. Take it down (carefully) and paint.
- Builder-grade light fixtures and interior fixtures used outside. The proper fixtures say quality to buyers.
- Mid-century awnings on exterior windows and doors. Buyers want to let the sun shine in.
- Mirrored-back splashes in kitchens and everywhere else. Mirrored walls and ceilings say 1980s hedonism.
- "Commitment" (strong, bold and trendy) colors. They look great in magazines, but as one buyer said, "I

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don't live in a magazine."

- Dropped ceilings. It might have updated a bungalow in the 1950s, but buyers want as much vertical space as possible.
- Flipping. Increasing inventories of unsold homes is increasing, signaling weakening demand by all buyers. If you are holding properties to fix up and resell, prepare to place them on market earlier in the year.

#### On the way out...

- Stainless steel appliances. Cleaning requirements aren't for everyone.
- Laminate flooring that looks like hardwood. Not only can buyers tell that it's not wood, the noise it makes with high-heel shoes is the deal killer during property showings.

#### What's in for 2006?

The bar will be set by the annual New American Home at the International Builder's Show in Orlando, Fla. The home is a popular demonstration project, now in its 23rd year, highlighting new concepts, materials, designs and construction techniques that can be replicated--in whole or in part--in housing built any place and in any price range. The 10,023 square-foot, Caribbean-style home includes an "endless pool," a spa, a master suite with a kitchen and laundry room, and a second-story library. The home was also built to be environmentally friendly and is Energy Star-rated through the U.S. Department of Energy Program "Build America."

The size of the New American Home helps to facilitate new ideas, but does not indicate huge homes will be "in." To the contrary, leading Nash's "in" list are smaller homes with high quality finishes. Also near the top of this year's "in" list:

- Quality kitchen cabinets. With the kitchen/great room the center of family living, buyers today are looking at furniture style cabinets.
- Bamboo wood floors. Bamboo could overtake maple as the favorite light-colored wood flooring in 2006.
- Wall space for flat-screen televisions. The popular location for installation in a renew construction is over the fireplace.
- Multiple and high-powered phone lines. With modems, DSL and WiFi moving into mainstream use, tech-savvy home buyers want "wired" homes.
- Separate shower stalls and bathtubs in upscale master bathrooms. The growing divide among "soakers" and "showerers" is increasing.
- Built-in home stereo systems are a must-have for many audiophiles. Wireless hasn't quite made the pre-wired audio system home obsolete, at least not in 2006.
- Balconies and decks wider than three feet. Home buyers want usable outdoor space; big enough for a bistro table and chairs and a couple of pots for container gardening.

Remember, what is deemed "in" this year could easily be "out" next year. If you are planning to stay in your next home for the long haul, find comfortable, workable features that appeal to your family and enjoy them. No one can tell you what you prefer.

*Tom Kelly's new book, "Cashing In on a Second Home in Mexico: How to Buy, Sell and Profit from Property South of the Border," was co-written with Mitch Creekmore, senior vice president of Houston-based Stewart*

*International. The book is available in retail stores, on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) or get your signed copy at [www.tomkelly.com](http://www.tomkelly.com).*

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