



Contra Costa Times
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Builder's Notebook: Vickie Nyland, Taylor Morrison, Bay Area Division

Housing has changed. The American dream, for many, has become an attractive condo or town-home built with sophisticated features such as granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, and open kitchen/family room spaces. Throughout the Bay Area, new communities are sprouting up which offer a variety of home buyers options for comfortable homes in well-located urban sites. Several of these modern communities were conceived and built by Taylor Morrison.

Urban infill is increasingly the source of new homes for Bay Area buyers, and Taylor Morrison is a prominent provider of these home developemnts which stress wise use of space proximity to jobs and transit, shared park spaces and, very importantly, according to Vickie Nyland, Northern California division president for Taylor Morrison, "attainable price points."

"Our MO [modus operandi, or way of accomplishing a goal] for the last sever years has been in these kinds of communities - homes with attainable price points, close to transit and to work. Our core is the Bay Area, particularly Contra Costa, Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties: We're very location oriented."

Understanding their demographic, a mix of singles, married couples, retried people as well as families with children, the home builder has focused on urban infill as a way of providing convenient locations, attractive architecture and ecologically sound features.

"Reuse of land is of our main areas [of focus]," explains Nyland. The company has zeroed in on light industrial areas that could be redesigned for housing and are near emerging and established employment centers. For example, communities in San Jose attract buyers who may work in Fremont and Hayward, while buyers in Concord are close to BART, could work locally or

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commute to San Francisco or south to Pleasanton.

These new neighborhoods are different from developments of just five years ago. They're denser, said Nyland, but most offer parks which residents can enjoy. They are also more affordable and have higher levels of features. "Providing a higher level of quality gives these people a good experience," said Nyland.

Respecting the cultural diversity of new buyers, among them many Asian and East Indian customers, "We show appreciation for their cultures" and work to design living spaces that will appeal to their traditions and preferences. For instance, notes Nyland, the company integrates principals of feng shui into home design.

Some neighborhoods are also designed with a younger demographic in mind, including Modern Ice, a development in San Jose that "is a bit denser and has more stairs," describes Nyland, but is appealing to younger, hip buyers, many of whom are making their first home purchase.

"It's fun to see the excitement of these buyers. They are showing that they really trust us to help them through these new steps [towards home ownership]."

In some cases, according to Nyland, lenders with whom the builder works are giving seminars to help potential buyers understand the loan process, and sales reps for Taylor Morrison also educate buyers about homeowners' associations and the requirements, dues and benefits of such associations.

Neighborhoods of townhomes and condos may be denser, but they are also more energy efficient and each has distinctive characteristics.

"I push us towards functionality," she says, "It may be dense, but we have to provide good living spaces, with good flow and function that works. Architectural features change, colors change and attached projects' are being designed for their sites and the ambience they can bring to a community. "We know how to do this really well," notes Nyland with pride.

She continues that the home builder aims for great kitchen orientation, for example, stressing

that the flow from the kitchen to adjoining space is very important: “Our kitchens are built to have interaction. That’s the gathering space,” she insists. And, she likes to include deck space for a barbeque.

As for energy issues, Nyland observes that the definition of energy efficiency has changed over the years, and progress continues. “We’re integrating different features and staying in a reasonable cost spectrum. Consumers aren’t yet ready to pay” for many of the eco features, but tank-less water heaters, man-made stone and Corian instead of marble, and conservation practices in construction - recycling of building materials, use of fly ash in concrete, for instance, are ways Taylor Morrison works to minimize a community’s carbon footprint.

For the long term, they are evaluating future building practices according to some of the green construction programs now being formulated on a wider basis in the Bay Area and California.

“And, by building in urban areas we are helping save fuel and lessening the area’s footprint,” she reminds.

“Builders are on the forefront of encouraging cities to change from industrial to residential,” she continues. “A key element is that we have a vision and show them [a city] how good the area could look in a few years. Color, architecture, green areas, interesting streetscape...once a city starts” encouraging a revamping of older areas nearby.

In today’s home market, no discussion would be complete without talking about prices. While some builders have featured higher prices, then provide incentives, Taylor Morrison takes a different tack. “This is another reflection on me,” notes Nyland. We aim to set the right price for the market. We are fair and competitive and we want our prices to show that.” The company does work with individual buyers and may provide interest-rate buy downs or other benefits. With Nyland at the helm, watch for Taylor Morrison to “continue what we do well, offer attainable price points and keep our eye out for housing in the right spots in the Bay Area.”

Visit www.taylor-morrison.com for information on Bay Area home communities.