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New Homes on the Horizon

Home construction on the Peninsula has taken on new proportions as several-acre projects — and in one case, the top floor of a shopping center — are being developed as ready-made communities. Today, potential buyers have options ranging from a \$500,000 loft to a \$2.1 million single-family home, with many choices in between.

Morgan Lane, Menlo Park

Sonya and Galen Fletcher will soon close escrow on their home in Morgan Lane, a Taylor Morrison community of 56 houses situated in Menlo Park near Willow and Middlefield roads, a stone's throw from Sunset Magazine.

The Craftsman-style homes are configured in three models, two of which are available in either two or three stories. Choices range from 1,470 to 1,951 square feet, (3 to 4 bedrooms, 2.5 to 3.5 baths) with prices ranging from the low \$1 millions to \$1.399 million.

“We sold our house in Redwood City last year,” Galen Fletcher said. “We rented for a year and looked aggressively to buy. We were really tired of losing out on multiple offers. Twice we came in second on fixer-uppers in San Carlos.”

The Fletchers chose an open floor plan for their two-story, three-bedroom home with its see-through kitchen and great room.

“The basic package is very good, but we upgraded a few things,” he said. “We added canned lighting, put marble in the master bathroom and hickory floors downstairs.”

“We are sacrificing a big yard,” Fletcher said. However, he feels that the trade off for their

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3,000-square-foot lot is that “the community becomes the yard,” citing the shared green area where their two young children can play and the proximity of nearby municipal resources.

Each home has a small patio area, and some homes have decks. Front porches are standard.

Vickie Nyland, president of Taylor Morrison, says that there was a real effort made to mesh with the existing neighborhood -- which translates to variation in elevations and rear-loaded garages, which enhance the entry.

“The neighbors thought that the street would be too wide,” Nyland said. To answer this concern there will be new medians planted with red oaks and Chinese pistache.

Sales Manager Joyce Boury says that the homes will be sold in nine phases, six or seven offered at a time. As of mid-March, five of the 13 were still available. Eight are below market rate.

Lane Woods, Menlo Park

The first Lane Woods Homes will become available this spring. Located adjacent to the Sunset Magazine campus in Menlo Park, Lane Woods is a SummerHill Homes community of 32 single-family homes, including the 2008 Sunset Idea Home. The residences range from 1,719 to 2,998 square feet (3 to 4 bedrooms, 2.5 to 3.5 baths) and vary in price from \$1.5 million to \$2.1 million.

“It’s a new neighborhood that looks like an old neighborhood. ... Over 100 trees were preserved,” said Elaine Breeze, senior vice president of SummerHill.

Some model floor plans are available in several configurations so as to preserve the site. The neighborhood common area features a stand of redwoods.

“No garage doors face Willow Road and some of the front porches are the full length of the house,” she said.

Breeze points out the strong horizontal design elements, which blend these new, two-story homes into the mostly ranch-style homes in the existing neighborhood. The signature split-rail fence surrounding Sunset will be extended -- complete with roses -- to front the new homes.

The basic package is already high end with such amenities as Wolf stainless-steel cooking appliances and Kohler bathroom sinks. In addition, owners can choose from a long list of custom options.

SummerHill homes will provide in-lieu fees for three of the five below market rate (BMR) homes. These fees will help fund approximately 22 BMR homes at a proposed Habitat for Humanity community in Menlo Park.

For John Suppes, founder and president of Clarum Homes in Palo Alto, building green is a passion. The 12, three-story, three-bedroom single-family homes at 996 Willow in Menlo Park, priced at \$1.74 million, are all state-of-the-art, energy-efficient “Enviro-homes.”

The Enviro-home is a prototype developed by Clarum. It is designed to reduce energy consumption by up to 90 percent by incorporating such features as on-demand water heaters, high-efficiency furnaces and appliances and radiant roof barriers. “We’ve exceeded Title 24 requirements by 30 percent or more,” Suppes said.

On the long list of Enviro-home features is the computerized irrigation controller that is linked to real-time weather conditions -- no more instant sprinklers turning on during an unexpected rain storm.

Overall, the feeling is contemporary, with stainless-steel stair rails, brushed-nickel light fixtures, stainless-steel Bosch kitchen appliances and bamboo floors in the kitchen and great room. Nine-foot ceilings on the second and third floors add an open, airy feel to the 1,868-square-foot homes.

“There was no sense in putting in solar panels because there is so much shading on the site,” Suppes said. “There’s a common area with benches and lots of Heritage oak trees,” he added. Front porches and decks are standard, as is the two-car garage.

Two of the homes are below market rate.

Cummings Park, East Palo Alto

“We’re bringing urban lifestyle to the Peninsula,” Sales Manager Anne Pearson said in

describing Cummings Park. The 19 950-square-foot lofts and 12 1,155-square-foot townhouses are located on the third floor of the Ravenswood Shopping Center in East Palo Alto, next to Jamba Juice.

The homes are accessed via stairs behind a locked first-floor entrance, or elevator. The units open to a cobble-stoned common area. Parking is underground.

The townhouses have a kitchen, living and dining room and one-half bath downstairs and two master suites upstairs. The lofts have a similar downstairs floor plan, but feature an upstairs loft that overlooks the living room, plus a bedroom and bath.

At \$500,000 to \$600,000 these homes are the least expensive under construction nearby. However, the \$400 monthly homeowners' fee is the highest (the others vary from \$110 to \$199.50).

"It's a hip, modern design," said Pearson, pointing out the 20-foot-high ceilings in the lofts and the stainless-steel stair railings. "Everything is standard," she added. This includes such amenities as GE Profile stainless-steel appliances, WiFi, slab granite in the kitchen and marble in the bathrooms.

So far six lofts and two townhouses have sold, including all of the six below-market-rate units.

Classics at Evandale, Mountain View

For Veronica and Jose Reginaldo, parents of three grown children, their new three-bedroom house in the Classics at Evandale community in Mountain View is their first experience with home ownership. They have lived in the area for 20 years.

"We didn't think we could afford it, but our eldest son helped," Veronica said.

Classics at Evandale is a 35-home community located on Evandale Avenue, near the intersections of Highways 101, 85 and 237. It consists mostly of single-family, 1,600-square-foot detached homes, with three bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths. Prices range from \$789,000 to \$809,000.

Each home has a side yard and front porch and a small front yard. The more expensive homes overlook the shared green area and also have wrap-around porches.

One bedroom is located on the first floor, next to the two-car garage. The second floor consists of a country kitchen with bay window, dining and living room and powder room. The master bedroom and bath plus another bedroom and bath are on the third floor.

Reginaldo says that she particularly enjoys the height of the home, and the fact that “it’s full of windows. ... I can see the mountains.”

To date, five homes are available, four of which are still under construction, so owners would have the option of choosing interior finishes from the design options. All of the below-market-rate homes have sold.