



LUXURY HOME & DESIGN

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MANSION

**How one custom builder
is rightsizing his showplaces.**

**by Theresa Swanson
photographs by Studio KW Photography**



IT'S OFFICIAL. AMERICA'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE McMansion is over. It was fun while it lasted, but those out-sized abodes – some call them Hummer Homes – cost more to build and maintain. And these days, even high-end buyers have developed a practical streak.

But that doesn't mean erstwhile McMansion buyers are willing to sacrifice luxury. They want to keep such features as large gathering areas, well-appointed kitchens, ample master suites and posh bathrooms.

Responding to that trend, custom-builder Bill Silliman, who for years specialized in elaborate homes of 8,000 square feet or more, set out to design a smaller line of homes with the same luxurious appointments and amenities. He's debuting the new designs in the Windermere community of Watersong.

Silliman's inspiration for one of those designs, the Casa Cortile, was Italian Renaissance architecture, which he enjoys studying when he and his wife, Marla, visit her family in Todi, a community perched atop a hill in the Umbria region of Italy. There, influences of ancient Etruscan architecture still hold sway.

A welcoming courtyard pays homage to the palazzos of Italy. Open arches create a sense of arrival and provide an extension of the great room for family gatherings and social events. Specialty foliage, imported specifically for this home, provides shade and solace.

The Umbria region of Italy features some of the finest examples of Renaissance architecture. By adapting classical styles and scaling them appropriately, Silliman has stayed true to his original inspiration while meeting the demand for luxury without excessive square footage.

"I wanted the Old World charm of courtyards and open, friendly floorplans you find in the Umbria region, but still offer homeowners the finishes and luxuries they've come to expect in custom homes," Silliman says.

His newest collection of custom homes averages just over 3,300 square feet – plenty roomy but almost cottage-sized compared to the palaces that were springing up several years ago, before conspicuous consumption, particularly in the form of outrageously proportioned homes, came to be considered a bit tacky.

"My buyers are no longer motivated by square footage," Silliman says. "They like new floorplans with less formal space. They want courtyards and outdoor living spaces complete with cabanas and fireplaces. But they want to keep luxury features such as large gathering areas, well-appointed kitchens, ample master suites and posh bathrooms."

With meticulous craftsmanship, energy-efficient construction and more sizzle per square foot, these homes aren't inexpensive by today's less lofty standards. But they aren't bank-breakers, either. The model shown is based priced at about \$600,000 and can go for as much as \$1 million with upgrades.

Still, it may well represent the future of luxury homebuilding. With proper design and planning, says Silliman, less truly can be more.



Silliman turned to Christy Scanlon and her team at Masterpiece Design Group to add the finishing interior touches, including a neutral color scheme accented by lacquered blacks and rich earth tones. Stacked slate niches flank the modern fireplace and draw the eye upward to a stained tongue-and-groove ceiling. The fireplace itself is a simple but arresting rectangle – a sharp, linear, minimalist form.



“Buyers may be willing to give up square footage, but they’re not willing to compromise functionality in the kitchen,” says Scanlon. “As with any kitchen, storage is a must!” In Casa Cortile, an oversized island (above) offers ample storage space, making it not only beautiful, but also functional, while custom-built cabinet doors open into a large walk-in pantry. In the dining room (left) the Masterpiece Design Group team placed an oversized table and accented it with dual light fixtures. Large accessories and artwork add drama. The kitchen, family dining room and grande room work together to create an ideal environment for entertaining.



A platform bed with a traditional tufted headboard is the centerpiece of Casa Cortile's opulent master bedroom. "We wanted this room to offer expansive views of the lanai and outdoor living space, but still act as a private sanctuary for the owners," says Lisa Mulholland of Masterpiece Design Group. The deep brown of the wood floors is complemented by the neutral colors of the rug. Wall treatments lead the eye to wood beams accenting the ceiling. The home has four bedrooms.



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A seamless shower ensures an unimpeded view of the master bath's unique wall treatment, which is actually a mosaic. "We found a fabulous mural consisting of 2-by-4 tile that we put together like a jig-saw puzzle. The effect is just stunning and adds a new dimension to the room," says Scanlon. The home has three full bathrooms.

A modern, multi-level residential building at night, featuring a large pool, a covered patio area, and a balcony with a glass railing. The interior is visible through large glass windows.

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True to Sillman's philosophy that "outdoors is the new formal," Scanlon and her team turned the outdoor living area, which flanks the pool and spa, into a series of settings where family and friends can gather. In addition to the main lanai there's a cabana complete with a fireplace and television.

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