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## Keep up with market/design trends: A short life-span - by Daniel Calano

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Caption

Considering what real estate topic to write about this time, I was between “What people want in housing” versus “Flattening of the yield curve.” The yield curve is interesting to certain personalities, and definitely has impact on real estate, but I thought I’d spare you that quantitative analysis. Maybe next time.

Last issue, I wrote about the pros and cons of “smart homes.” Today, I am focusing on the half a dozen trends that, when followed, will “ensure” your success in residential development. Or so I thought, until I read a Globe article about how the different fans of NFL football teams prefer different things in their housing. The article says Seattle Seahawks fans want large wrap around porches, and New England Patriots fans don’t need swimming pools. Pittsburg Steelers fans desperately need large designer closets and master bedrooms; but our puritan roots of Pats fans ranked those the lowest. Understandably, Dallas Cowboys fans insist on outside BBQ areas with fire pits, and Denver Broncos fans wanted a man cave.

But, if there was this much diversity of residential preference around what football team you preferred, could there be any trend consistency across the board? The answer is Yes, there are still a few mostly trending preferences in home design:

- Clean design: Whether you are millennial or baby boomer, most statistics show a new interest in simple, clean and open residential plans. Gone are the days of corridors, rabbit warrens and dining rooms. We have all seen this trend for a while with the coming of the great room, encompassing kitchen, dining and family venues.
- Lack of clutter: Trending with larger open space, people want less clutter, lower amounts of furniture, and furniture that does not scream out “I am a big couch and proud of it”. Related to this, is a new disdain for old furniture, antiques, essentially anything brown or heavy. This I have verified with auctioneers, who affirm that beautiful mahogany highboy dressers can be bought for a few hundred dollars, far less than an IKEA piece painted in white serving the same use. One dealer told me that even he, after fifty years in the business, “stole” a hutch for a few thousand dollars and, trying to resell it in his own auction, caved to a buyer at a few hundred. By the way, don’t count on

your offspring to want these things when you can't sell them yourself.

- **Low maintenance:** Again, whether up and coming youngster or baby boomer, no one has time to spend the weekend painting and stripping furniture. Robot lawn mowers are arriving just in the nick of time. It is a rare individual who wants to put sweat equity into rehabbing an old house, when they can better use their own skill set to make more money if they simply work over the weekend. In fact, it is a rare individual who wants to take on any antique house. Probably "This Old House" doesn't compete well with streaming Netflix series.

- **Bright cheery sunlight:** Similar to overall modern space desire, people want large windows, little window framing, and minimal window dressing. Best is no wall at all, and simple blinds to keep light out when necessary or for privacy. Along with a wall of glass, people insist on high ceilings. Long gone are the days where a seven foot ceiling is appropriate, and typically not even allowed under building code. Eight and a half feet is minimum, nine feet in some areas, 12 feet can be highly desirable. You get the picture, big, tall, uncluttered, well-lit rooms.

- **Downsizing:** This last trend is a little trickier, and typically relates to empty nesters and retirees. It was almost mandatory in estate planning that the family house be sold and smaller space be secured. Recently, however, some retirees are thinking differently, actually increasing the size of their houses. This is in hope that grandchildren will return for vacation and quality time with grandma and grandpa. All I can say about that is your house better be Cape Cod waterfront, or in Florida, or a farm with lots of cuddly animals next to a ski slope. Turns out grandchildren have busy lives as well and don't show up as planned.

Back to the Cowboys and the Seahawks. Clearly, differences in geography, climate, historical culture, and so on make for variations. However, keep these few trends in mind and watch carefully for preference changes. Things trend over a lot shorter timeframe these days. In Florida, they are tearing down 25 year old Tuscan style clay tiled roof structures to build more modern and open. And in Los Angeles, "mid-century" architecture is bringing record prices. Who could have predicted that one? Know you stuff; plan ahead; design with flexibility.

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