

Parade of Homes: A trip to Europe

Texas does its take on Old World luxury

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By STEVE BROWN / The Dallas Morning News

McKINNEY – At this year's Parade of Homes, don't expect contemporary, or craftsman, or even Texas Hill Country style.

This year's show is a trip to Europe.

That is, it's as close as you can get to Europe on a hilltop in McKinney.

There are seven luxury homes in the North Texas builders' annual showcase, which starts its three-week run on Saturday in the Stonebridge Ranch development west of U.S. Highway 75.

Last year's show in Frisco focused on high tech. This year it's all about high style.

And with many of the houses topping \$1 million, there's plenty of glitz.

The home tour gives small custom builders a chance to break out of the crowd and attract buyers.

"It's a great opportunity for us to show our product and put our name out in the marketplace," said David Waller, who owns Acacia Custom Homes.

Mr. Waller used a Greek architect and an Italian designer to create his 5,912-square-foot Old World-style house.

He's been working on it for more than four months.

"We did about a month of that work last night," Mr. Waller said this week as he showed off the finished product.

The four-bedroom, 4 ½ -bath home has stone and hand-finished wood floors and a wine cellar tucked under the stairs.

But the star of this \$1.4 million house is out back – an elaborate swimming pool and fountains done in blue mosaic tiles and limestone.

"We've tried to cross the European feel with American pleasures," said Mr. Waller, who's new to the custom home building business.

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JUAN GARCIA/DMN
 The 'Vita d'Amore' house is built in an Italian style.

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JUAN GARCIA/DMN
 The upstairs game room or third living area of the 5 Gables House built by David Waller a Dallas builder, is one of the Parade of Homes tour in McKinney.

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"Our goal is to build about 10 houses a year."

Business potential

Builder J.D. Smith does five to eight custom homes a year, so building his 6,362-square-foot Normandy-style house was a big commitment.

But with almost 40,000 people expected to troop through the five-bedroom, six-bath house, the potential for new business is good.

"We anticipate this will be a mark for us," said Mr. Smith, who has built luxury homes in the Park Cities, North Dallas and parts of Collin County for about five years.

Mr. Smith estimates that after the home show is over, his house will fetch \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million.

That's easy to believe, looking at the 21-foot-tall, mural-painted cathedral ceiling in the dining room and the stone fireplace in the 17-by-22-foot enclosed patio.

Upstairs, along with five bedrooms, you'll find the requisite media room.

"In nine out of 10 homes, I put a media room over the garage," Mr. Smith said.

While the builders make of point of saying their model homes aren't over the top or grandiose, it's hard to ignore interiors packed with pricey furniture, art and decorative items.

The seven homes are indicative of the more-is-better trend – these days, builders put granite countertops even in moderately priced homes.

Builder George C. Fuller's Italian-style house, which he calls "Vita d'Amore," or life of love, has an exterior punctuated with turrets, leaded-glass windows and hand-forged iron railings.

Inside, there's a two-story study off the entry rotunda, a huge master suite and a media room big enough to accommodate an entire Cub Scout troop.

"I wanted it to be grand but cozy," said Mr. Fuller, who's been in business since the late 1980s.

It's cozy indeed – with almost 7,000 square feet, the stone-and-brick house has two laundry areas and a children's bedroom with three balconies.

The latest features

All of the houses have their share of modern features, such as LCD panels to monitor security and sound systems and high-tech hot water and heating systems.



JUAN GARCIA/DMN

The living room area with a small view of the second floor of the Penhollow Custom Homes of Dallas.

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JUAN GARCIA/DMN

Dallas builder David Waller sits in the pool area of the 5 Gables House he built and will be part of the Parade of Homes in McKinney.

McKinney.

Green Mountain Energy Co., one of the show sponsors, is powering the houses with what it touts as "100 percent wind-generated electricity."

The Home Builders Association of Greater Dallas brings judges from out of town to determine the tour's nine Presidents Awards.

This year's overall favorite home award went to George C. Fuller Custom Homes, and J.D. Smith Custom Homes won best overall interior design.

Shelley Reynolds' French-style house has a porch with remote-controlled screens that slide down to keep bugs off your barbecue.

At 5,450 square feet, hers is one of the least expensive homes on the tour.

"We're going to try and keep it under \$1 million," said Ms. Reynolds, who won the award for best craftsmanship.

The five-bedroom house has "Versailles-patterned" travertine floors and a family room with rough stone walls and wooden beams.

This is Reynolds Signature Homes' second show house, so the crew knew what to expect when it started work last September.

"The best award we can win is a sold house," said her husband, Jeff Reynolds.

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PARADE OF HOMES

Where: Stonebridge Ranch community in McKinney

When: May 21-June 12. Open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays except for Memorial Day.

Cost: \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors and \$6 for children

What: Seven custom homes that showcase architecture, interior designs and building techniques. The builders are Penhollow Custom Homes, Fields Custom Homes, J.D. Smith Custom Homes, George C. Fuller Custom Homes, Acacia Custom Homes, Reynolds Signature Homes and Martineck-Johnson Custom Homes. Most of the houses are priced at \$1 million or more.

Information: Call 972-931-4840 or go to www.dallasbuilders.com.

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JUAN GARCIA/DMN
J.D. Smith a Dallas builder in the dining area of the home he built that is part of the Parade of Homes in McKinney.

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