

Solved: Architectural Identity

In the heart of Cascade, nestled in a natural setting peppered by mature trees, Mosaic Properties Inc. and Pioneer Construction are creating a detached condominium community that stamps a new brand of mentality on maintenance-free living.

A monochromatic, tone-on-tone color palette and natural lighting play up the craftsmanship and architecture of this 3,700-square-foot, European-bungalow style condominium. Transom windows above the doorway leading into the sun-room (off the living room) maintain an open feel and make the most of natural light, played up wherever possible since the home sits on a wooded lot. Lighter paint and fabrics were chosen to reflect the light. Artwork throughout the home is courtesy of LaFontsee Gallery & The Underground Studio.



Above: Reflective, metallic pearl paint paired with a flat chocolate hue adds drama in the office, which can be opened up to or closed off from the main living area.

Right: Custom solid wood doors are a staple in every Balsam Hill home.

also have the option of selecting their own local architect from a pre-approved list, including Visbeen and Associates, Frimodig Design, Johnson Newhof, Jeff Visser Residential Design, Robert Sears Architect, Design Plus, Haisma Residential Design and Karczewski Architects.

“In most condo communities, you don’t have that choice,” observed Brad Rottschafer, president of Mosaic Properties Inc. “The architecture is more homogenous, and the garage is often placed in front of the home, where it becomes the prominent feature.”

“Our garages are in the rear of our homes,” he noted. “That gives the architect three sides to work with, and just allows more to be done design-wise. It also allows each homeowner to have their own individual style. Certain stylistic elements, like similar brackets, are used on every condo so they flow together. But there’s enough flexibility in the architectural codes to accommodate everything from European-French country to a more cottagey look.”

The unique but complementary exteriors of Balsam Hill’s homes will be enhanced by their natural surroundings, more than 30 percent of which has been dedicated to open and buffer spaces. “Many areas have been declared as ‘no-cut’ zones,” Rottschafer said. “We’d like to see Balsam



Customization combined with a scientific and artistic approach to architecture serve as the foundation for the “village” of Balsam Hill. The finished community will include 25 “village homes,” each of which is to be based on one of several different floor plans designed by Pioneer to ensure stylistic harmony. The goal? To reintroduce authentic architectural design prevalent in Grand Rapids during the 1920s, featuring balanced proportions,

sheltering roofs, a diversity of natural materials and non-corner-cutting, traditional craftsmanship that will age gracefully. But a cookie-cutter community isn’t harmonious with the developers’ vision.

Balsam Hill’s architect, Robert Winters, works closely with homeowners to customize the exterior of each village home, using “the Michigan landscape as the palette for material and color selections,” he said. Homeowners



Left: Keller and Schrotenboer found this ceramic bowl and had it glazed, drilled out and set upon a bedside end table to serve as a sink in the main floor’s half bath.

Below: Holland artist and Hope College professor Daryn Lowman created his-and-her custom ceramic sinks in the master bathroom. These were mounted on tempered glass, drilled out to accommodate plumbing.

Hill serve as a model for the larger community.”

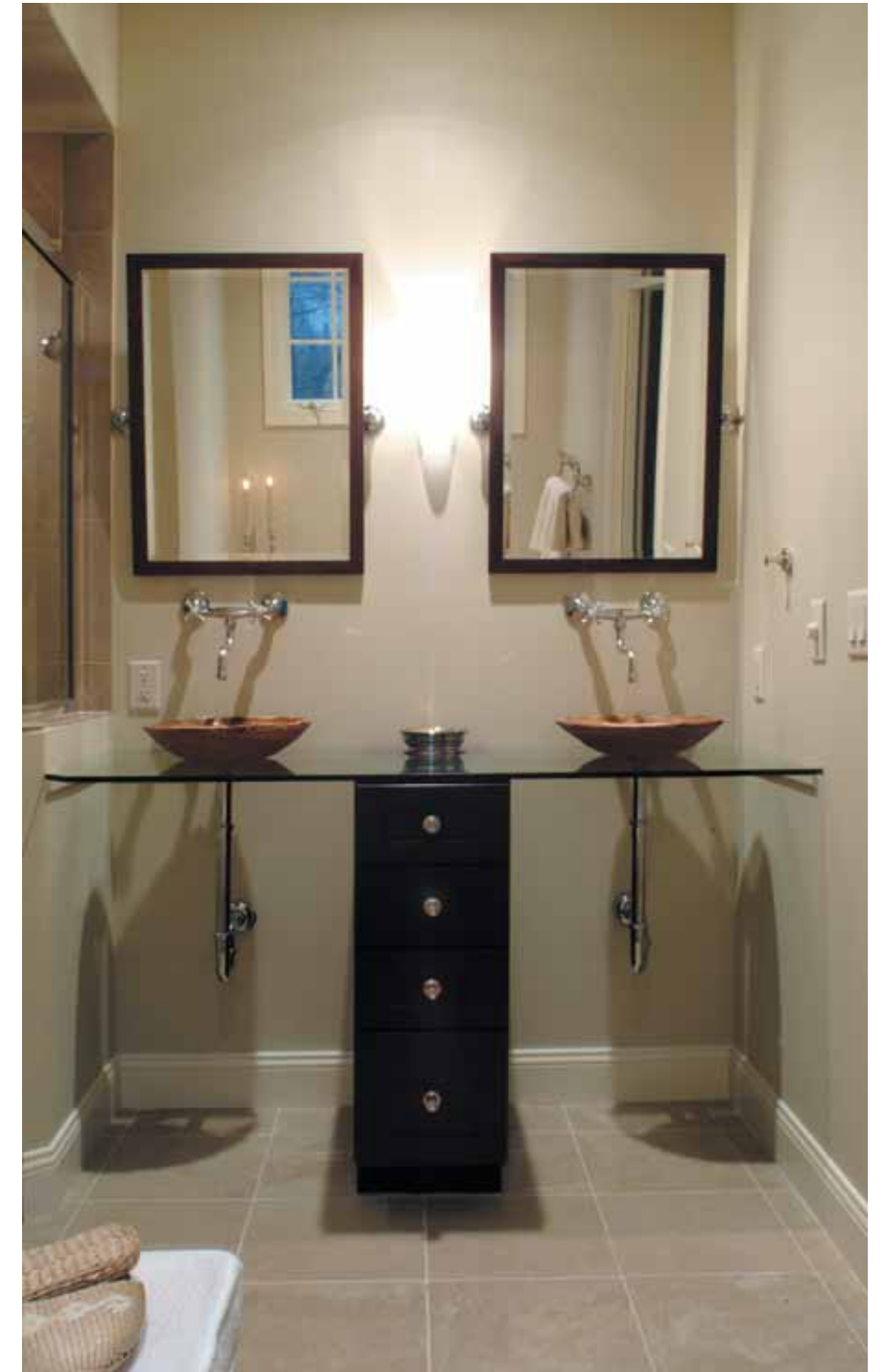
While mature tree growth on lots, more than three acres of woodlands and easy access to the Ada-Cascade bike trail are being preserved, developers also are bringing back elements of streetscape design that will give this condo neighborhood notable character. “Sidewalks and gaslights along with interesting architecture make the street a wonderful place to walk or sit on the porch and observe neighborhood life,” Rottschafer said.

Minutes away from shopping and dining, Mosaic’s condominium community caters particularly to active empty nesters or families whose children are older.

“Balsam Hill appeals to people breaking into the condo market earlier than usual, maybe with a high schooler still at home, who want to downsize from a large home but still want customization,” Rottschafer said. “That’s not to say people in this market no longer want space. Many of them still do want larger living areas and extra bedrooms to accommodate children and grandchildren who come to visit. These spaces are designed logically. Upper and/or lower levels can be shut off when they’re not in use, offering efficient heating and cooling options and making the house cozy and manageable or larger for entertaining.”

Each floor plan designed by Pioneer provides several spaces that can be customized according to the homeowner’s lifestyle. An upper-level bonus room can be an extra bedroom, studio, den area or office; a lower-level space becomes a living room as easily as it serves as a billiards or exercise room, and the adjoining space often becomes a theater room — but could be anything else as well.

To help sort out options, design time with Balsam Hill interior coordinators





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Lisa Keller and Becky Schrottenboer is included in each home’s price, which begins at \$370,000. A Web site program, “My Home,” enables homeowners to access design information about their home-in-process through a passcode.

“It gives everyone, from the homeowners to the designers to the project manager, an updated place to go and check to make sure everything is moving along correctly,” Schrottenboer said. “It also eliminates communication problems. Nobody gets caught up in dragged-out games of phone tag or misunderstood messages. Like this development, and the people behind it, it’s a more forward way of thinking.”

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Lisa M. Jensen is a free-lance writer who lives in Rockford. For more information on Balsam Hill, visit balsamhill.com.



Left: KraftMaid’s Huntington cabinetry from Dimensions Kitchen & Bath Inc. features obscured seeded glass and Restoration Hardware’s brushed nickel hardware. The black honed granite island contrasts with St. Cecilia Light granite elsewhere. “We were tired of all the maple flooring we’ve seen installed over the past few years,” designer Lisa Keller said. “So we used this ‘Laurel’ model walnut flooring. We liked the chocolate accent, and the character of this wood.”

Right: Platinum metallic glass tile from Virginia Tile Co. accentuates the cooking area, offering texture and interest.