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MERITAGE HOMES

Built for the Connoisseurs of Northern California Life

Meritage Homes puts itself ahead of the competition with a new design center and a strong architectural team.

By Melinda Sheckells

The word meritage, a hybrid of the words merit and heritage, is used by wine connoisseurs to describe the blending of the finest grapes to make a vintage wine. Aply named, Meritage Homes' East Bay division blends the tradition of the area with the merit of excellent building and design principles. A member of the Meritage Corporation, which builds in Texas, Arizona, California and Nevada under various brands, Meritage Homes of Northern California builds for the second and third time move-up buyers throughout the East Bay and Sacramento.

"Meritage Homes communities attract

buyers with discretionary income and equity," says Bill Mayben, East Bay Division President. Marketing toward that demographic, Meritage has worked with the design team at Omega Architectural Group since 1987 to bring discerning buyers one-of-a-kind designs and floorplans with amenities that cannot be found in other new home communities.

"It is not a matter of being able to put up a box and sell it. There is a lot of competition. Buyers demand quality, workmanship and design," says Steven Bowker, owner and president of Omega Architectural Group. "Design is driven at its highest levels. Consumers aren't going to let us go back to building just a square box." Bowker estimates that Omega has completed over 100 different projects with Meritage. He attributes the firm's steadfast relationship with the builder to a common understanding.

"Bill Mayben and I work very closely

▼ Sterling Bay at Lakeshore offers large executive estate homes on big oversize lots, many in premium locations along the lake.



▲ When purchasing a Meritage Home, buyers are making a choice for a certain quality-of-life. Shown here, the Sterling Preserve in Brentwood.

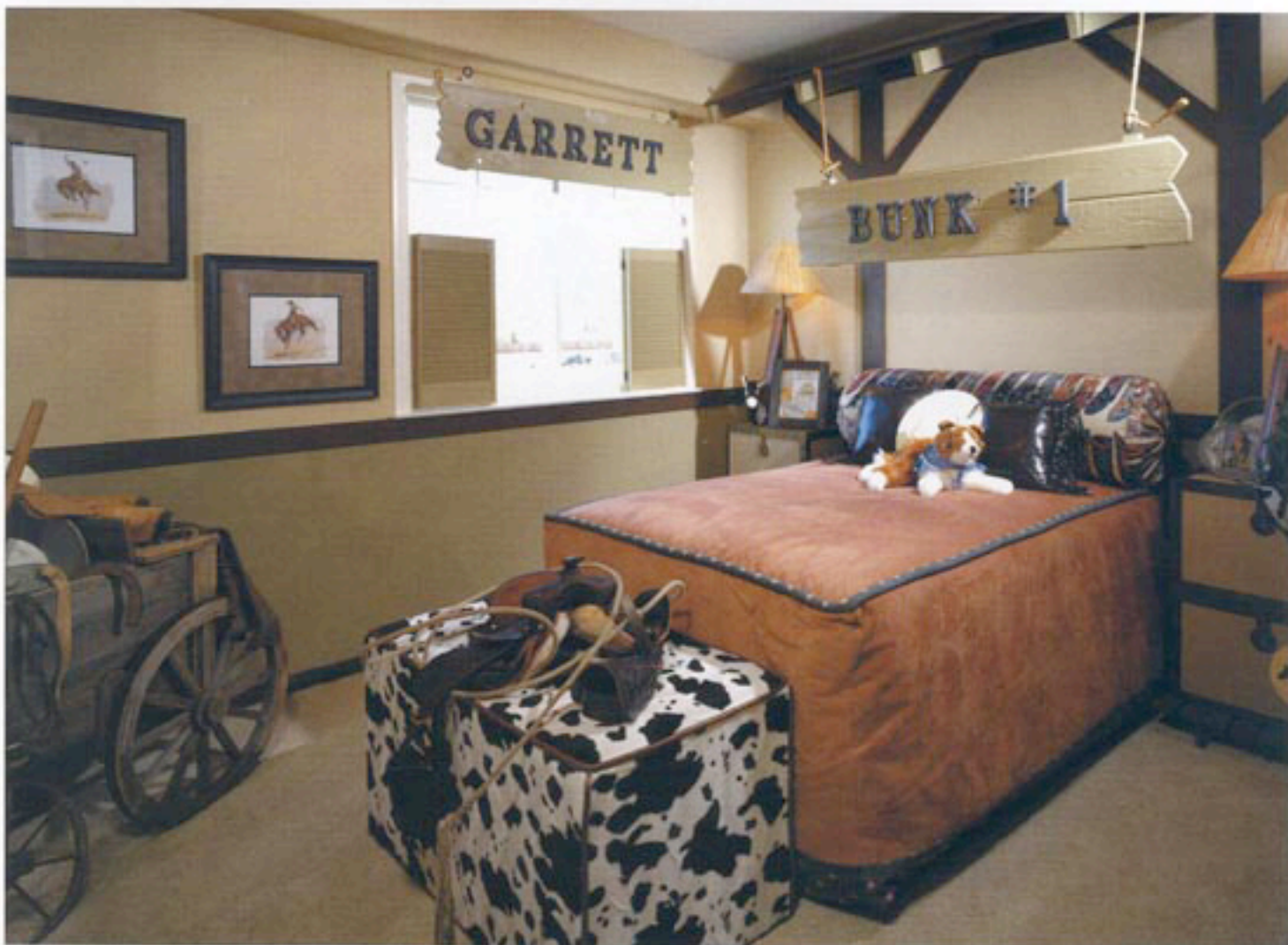
together. He is a very good visionary and inspires us to create new ideas. We all understand the Northern California lifestyle," Bowker says. "In Northern California there needs to be some sense of privacy in the home, yet you don't want it closed up."

An additional part of building for the Northern California lifestyle is making proper use of outdoor spaces, including covered patios and what Bowker describes as "outdoor living pockets."

The evolution of design

Bowker says that as city planning departments create new guidelines for residential housing, architects and builders must come up with new housing solutions.

"People are very concerned about the look of their neighborhood," he says. "They want to be able to pick out their own home in a row of houses. Current trends lead toward diversity in exterior



▲ A child's bedroom at Meritage's Sterling Bay community.

▼ Current trends lead toward diversity in exterior elevations and optional stone packages.



elevations and optional stone packages. Inside, great rooms allow us to use space that was originally given to the living room to create wider hallways and bigger secondary bedrooms."

An awe-inspiring options program

In November, Meritage Homes opened a 3,500-square-foot design center, with the goal of streamlining the options and upgrades selection process for their buyers. Nestled in an industrial area in Salida, Calif., the design center is built like a home, showcasing countless carpet selections, ceramic tile and granite choices, cabinet finishes, appliances, lighting and more. Operated by Builders Showcase Interiors, the Meritage Design Center was a collaborative effort between the builder and the options expert.

"Bill had a vision to open a design center. It is beyond anything that we have



▲ Sterling Bay at Lakeshore offers large executive estate homes on big oversize lots, many in premium locations along the lake.



▲ Homebuyers want to be able to identify their house as being different in a streetscape even though they live in a tract. Meritage offers a significant amount of options that make that possible.

done for any other builder," says Katherine Kawaguchi, a representative of Builders Showcase Interiors. "If you give the buyer options, they will create their dream home. Let's show them what they can do."

For the design center, BSI created a hybrid space with the look and feel of residential, but also a space that retains its purpose as a highly functional design center.

"The structure is, as its base purchase price, only a part of a finished home. Buyers can take a floorplan and make it look like it is worth another \$100,000," Mayben says. "Buyers make the choices that give them a higher quality-of-life."

For more information on Meritage Homes visit www.meritage-ca.net.

For more information on Builders Showcase Interiors, visit www.bsii.com.

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