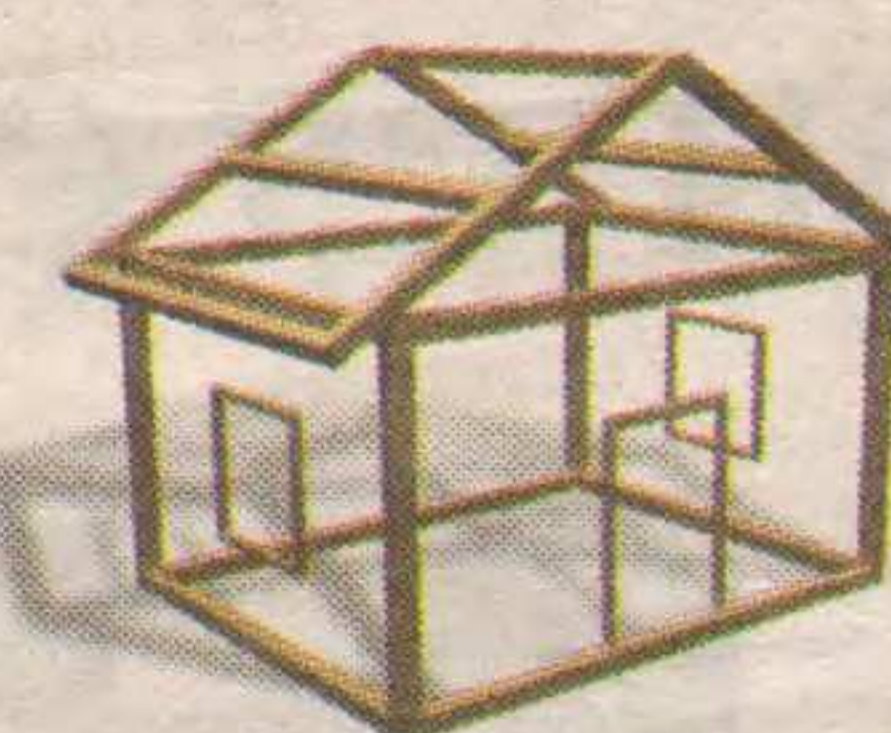


Chicago Tribune CHICAGO HOMES



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The finish line

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William Ryan Homes directs buyers to its newly remodeled, 3,000-square-foot selections center in Schaumburg, where they can view cabinet samples, doors, light fixtures and more.

The finishing touches

Choosing design details that express your home's personality can be daunting — and should be fun



If choosing interior finishes is too challenging for you, visit a design center or ask an interior design professional for help.

BY KARI RICHARDSON | Special to the Tribune

Buyers choose new-construction homes because they want to direct the details — everything from the stain on the dining room floor to the glaze on the kitchen cabinets.

"That's the beauty of building a new home," said Brian Brunhofer, president of Meritus Homes, based in Deerfield. "You get to pick every little part and piece."

But the best part about building — orchestrating all those details — also has the power to overwhelm people.

Consider all the interior finishes to select: doors, trim, appliances, molding, flooring, cabinets, counter-tops, lighting and plumbing fixtures. Buyers may make scores of decisions, depending on which builder they select, ranging from highly visible items (floor stain and cabinets) to minutiae (grout color for the kids' bathroom).

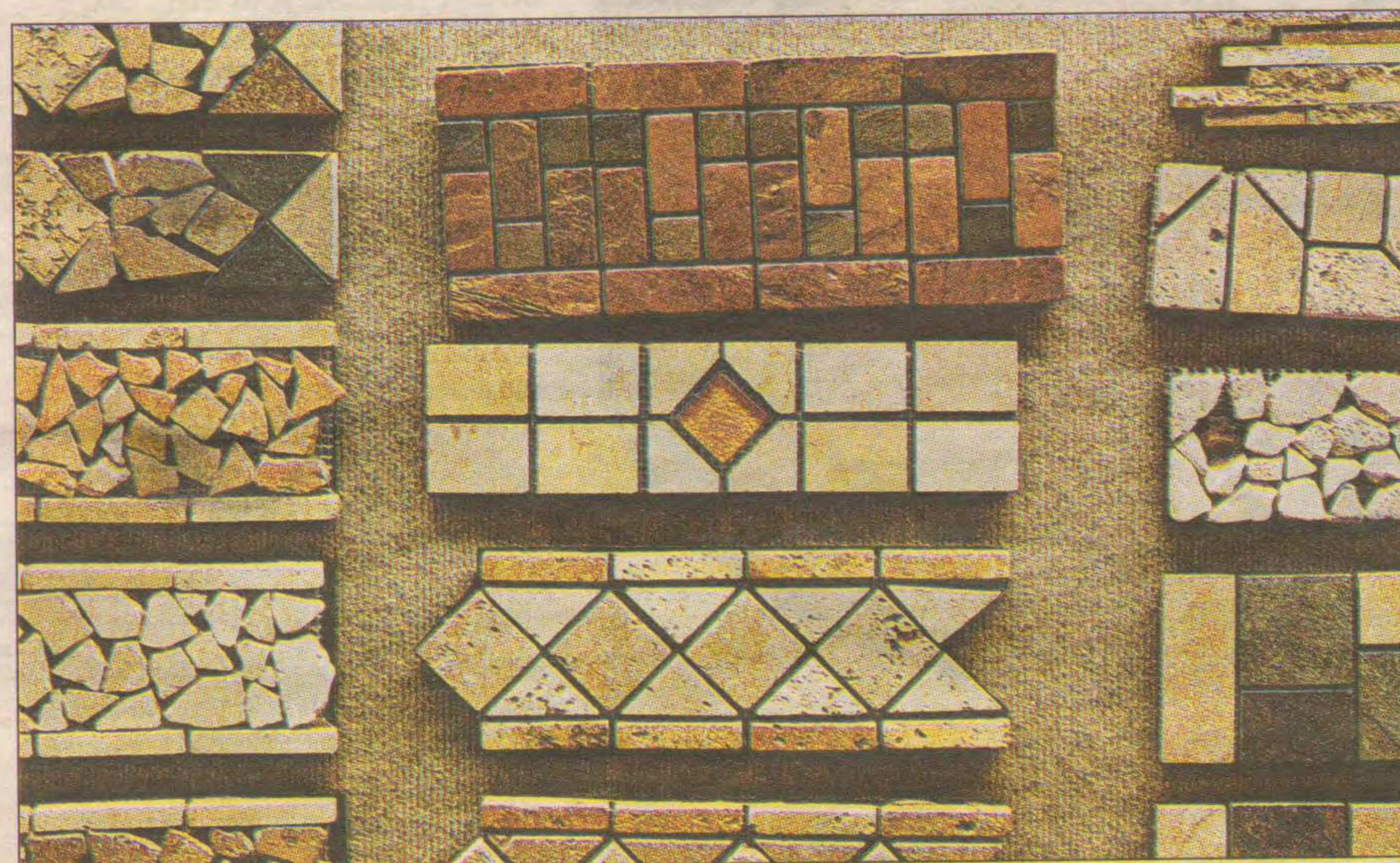
"People start the process with smiles on their faces, but it's no doubt an intense process," Brunhofer said. "We want to make sure our buyers keep those smiles."

Making the stakes even higher is the fact that a home is the most expensive purchase most people are likely to make. In the interest of making sure it turns out right, here are a few tips to get to the finish line.



LANE CHRISTIANSEN/PHOTOS FOR THE TRIBUNE

Cambridge Homes' World of Cambridge design center in Elgin offers visitors plentiful choices in cabinet designs, as well as ceramic and stone offerings.



Start an idea file. If building a home might figure into the future, start compiling an idea file now, advised Christy Whelan, director of sales for Winfield-based Airhart Construction.

"Start looking through design magazines and collecting color and fabric swatches for your dream file," Whelan said. "That way you will already have an idea of what you want when you are ready to build."

It's no surprise that pleasing people is easiest when they have an idea of what they like. But putting a label to what you love is not necessary — pictures are the most effective tool, Whelan said.

Websites such as Pinterest and Houzz put thousands of ideas within easy reach of anyone with a computer or tablet. They can be used to create electronic idea files that can be tapped later.

And don't forget to bring fabric swatches from draperies, couches and bedspreads — any new furniture you plan to buy or existing furniture you will keep, advised Chris Naatz, vice president of sales and marketing for D.R. Horton's Chicago division.

Decode the process. In the course of building a production home, there are typically many interior colors, finishes and styles to select. When building a semicustom or custom home, there are even more decisions to make.

Find out how the process will work with the builder you've chosen: Does the builder have an in-house selection center you need to peruse? Or, do you need to visit the tile store, plumbing showroom and other suppliers on your own?

William Ryan Homes directs buyers to its newly remodeled, 3,000-square-foot selections center in Schaumburg, where they can view cabinet samples, doors, light fixtures and more, said Todd Warshauer, director of sales and marketing for the homebuilder's Chicago division. Also on display are the builder's top 20 options, which include materials such as ceramic tile, granite countertops, wide-plank wood flooring and kitchen backsplashes.

"It's sort of like when you go to a restaurant and the waiter or waitress goes through the specials," Warshauer said.

The timeline for making choices can

vary. Some builders require buyers to make all selections before construction can begin. Other builders require that buyers select each product by the time it is needed in the construction process. Indecision now can mean delay later.

Condominium buyers at Weiss Development's Lincolnshire Place in Lincolnshire and River's Edge in Vernon Hills select countertops, flooring stain, faucets, cabinets and lighting, among other things. Selections are made before the interior of a buyer's unit is finished, a process that takes about three months unless someone has purchased a completed unit, said Helen Weiss, president of marketing for Weiss Development. Among the most popular choices for interior finishes are hand-scraped wood floors and maple cabinets — easy-care products that reflect buyers' desire for a low-maintenance lifestyle.

Set the budget. Creating a budget for each part of the project can make the selections process more manageable, said interior designer Kristin Petro, owner of Kristin Petro Interiors in Elmhurst, who guides clients through design decisions for new-home construction, as well as remodeling projects. Directing your attention to products and styles in your price range will keep your options from becoming overwhelming.

Just be sure to establish your budget before you get to the design center or retail store, Naatz said. "That way if you are not doing granite, you don't go to the granite section."

The pros know. Wondering whether it's worth it to hire a professional? A designer can help sort through the choices, providing confirmation that all the pieces work together to create a cohesive design.

"What we witness is that hiring a professional makes the process a lot less stressful," said Orren Pickell, chief executive of Northfield-based Orren Pickell Building Group and Orren Pickell Design Group. "A designer will bring you three or four different tile samples to choose from, but there are thousands of different kinds of tile out there."

A good designer will do the legwork, help you sort through choices, and can even save you money by helping to balance reasonably priced products with more expensive ones, Pickell said.

Stay true. Trying to predict if white kitchens or mosaic backsplashes will still be in vogue three years from now can be taxing. If you plan to live in your house for some time, choose the finishes and styles you love and forget what's popular with others, Petro said. "Create the home you want to live in," she said.

If your home is a shorter-term investment, stick with classic design, Petro said. And take a deep breath. This is supposed to be fun.

Petro recently began a consultation by asking a new client what his style was. His answer: "Can't you just assign us one?"

"He was so overwhelmed," she said, "he couldn't say what his style was."

STREETVIEWS IN LAKE IN THE HILLS BY LESLIE MANN

What's on the spring checklist at your home?



Blacktopping the driveway, mulching around the shrubs and starting the garden. My mom helps me with the garden.

den. She grew up on a farm, so she knows what she's doing.

— Arlene Kirker, of Algonquin, customer service



Retile a floor and install some carpeting. I'd love to have a new deck too, but that's too expensive.

— Tonya Garcia, of Lake in the Hills, stay-at-home mom



I'm taking a cruise! I downsized and live in a town house, so I don't have too many home chores anymore.

I'll just do some gardening.

— Dennis Wilkins, of Lake in the Hills, retired



Mulching and cleaning up what I didn't get to in the fall. My wife is in charge of the flowers, and I'm in charge of the lawn.

— Ted Adams, of Lake in the Hills, retired engineer