

BUILDER PROFILE

CLASSIC HOMES OFFERS EXCITING OPTIONS FOR LANDOWNERS

HOMEBUILDER OFFERS HOMEBUYERS A WIDE ARRAY OF CHOICES

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Contributing Writer

An experienced Virginia builder now is offering custom and semi-custom homes at affordable prices to those who own land in the Baltimore region.

Classic Homes of Maryland, a division of Classic Homes, has been building homes in Virginia since 1983 and in Montgomery County for the last three years.

"Now we're coming to Baltimore to open an office because of the volume of calls we've been getting," says Amita Jain, co-owner and vice president of Classic Homes of Maryland (www.classicmd.net).

The family-run company, she explains, was started by her father, who has built more than 1,200 homes in northern Virginia.

"Three years ago he talked to me and said, 'How about opening an office in Maryland?' I was working on Wall Street and I left my Wall Street job and opened the office in Rockville." She joined two brothers in the family business.

One of the reasons for the high volume of calls is, quite simply, the price.

"If you had a lot, custom builders usually charge between \$150 and \$400 a square foot," Jain says. "A 4,000-square-foot home could cost a million dollars. We build homes from \$80 to \$100 a square foot. These are actual stick-built homes; these are not modular or pre-fab homes."

The difference, she explains, is the set of floor plans Classic Homes uses. They offer buyers a wide array of choices in four series of floor plans – the Classic Series, the City Series, the Ranch Series and the Luxury Series – and they've fine-tuned the art of building those houses.

"We've been building for a long time," Jain says. "We know our costs down to the penny, so we can make it affordable."

The Classic Series are the most popular; homes in the series range from 2,900 to



4,275 square feet and cost between \$250,000 to \$339,000, not including the land. The Hampton model, at 4,100 square feet, seems to be a particular favorite with Baltimore buyers. The two-story, four-bedroom home is almost entirely open, with a minimum of walls, and is filled with natural light.

"Those prices are for turn-key construction; everything is included," Jain says.

Buyers also have plenty of chances to customize their homes because these truly are custom homes.

They can choose from among brick, stone, stucco and hardy plank fronts and a variety of elevations. They can add porticos, porches or reverse gables, any exterior touches to make the home their own. They can modify floor plans to create the interior of their dreams.

One popular option these days is adding an extra bath so that every bedroom has its own bathroom. Buyers also choose to add outdoor living space, in the form of sunrooms, conservatories, patios and porches.

Many buyers in two-story homes opt to add an elevator shaft, using it as a closet now, but knowing they can easily add an elevator later if needed.

Standard features in the homes include kitchens with granite countertops, 42-inch cabinets and stainless steel appliances; bathrooms with tile, dual vanities and soaking tubs; and full, unfinished basements with plumbing and electric roughed in.

Nine-foot ceilings are standard, and gas fireplaces made of granite create a cozy, welcoming feel on a cold night.

The appliances meet EnergyStar standards, and buyers will receive a certificate for an energy tax credit, thanks to the ener-

gy-conserving measures built into these homes.

Some buyers are opting to have a geothermal heating and cooling system built along with the house. Jain says the hefty price tag – a system can run about \$40,000 – still is off-putting to many buyers, but interest is increasing because of the lifelong energy savings and the opportunity to radically reduce one's carbon footprint.

Green choices in material help the environment, too, and buyers will appreciate options like bamboo floors, non-VOC paints and lumber from areas that support green building. All of the homes come with energy-efficient Andersen Low-E windows.

Buyers who own a city lot or a small lot will look to the City Series, which offers 12 floor plans. The 2,450-square-foot Hamilton is designed for abnormally narrow, deep lots, with a front elevation that masks how narrow the house is – it can be built as little as 23 feet wide. Despite the narrow style, the three-bedroom, three-bath home still boasts spacious rooms because space is allocated from front to back, rather than side to side. The Hamilton starts at \$279,900.

The Danbury, at 4,600 square feet, tucks the garage behind the home to present a lovely exterior to enhance the streetscape. The garage leads into a mudroom and the kitchen, but guests who come through the front door will be dazzled by a grand, two-story foyer with tray ceiling. This elegant home can be built for \$429,900.

The Ranch Series, which offers four models, was created for those who prefer one-story living. The three-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath Belmont is the most popular and starts at \$249,900. The open floor plan includes a large master suite and a first-

floor study.

In the Classic Series, which offers 11 models, the 3,250-square-foot, \$299,900 Summerset is designed with a country look to fit easily into historic neighborhoods. Inside, though, it's all modern convenience with a two-story family room and a first-floor master suite.

The largest homes are found in the Luxury Series. The Windsor truly feels like a castle, with 9,800 square feet. The grand foyer features a circular staircase, but the house also comes with an elevator. Castles once had their own private chapels, and the Windsor offers a private prayer or meditation room. There's ample space for more social gatherings, thanks to a two-story living room, family room, breakfast room and den. The second-floor master suite features room-sized walk-in closets, a sitting room and a private balcony. Just three of these special homes are built each year.

Classic Homes of Maryland also can build a completely custom home for about \$120 a square foot.

Part of the reason the prices are so low, Jain explains, is because the company has perfected the art of building quality homes quickly. Construction takes about six months, thanks to their expertise, knowledge and tight management.

The building process starts with a complimentary visit to the buyer's lot, where Classic Homes experts will offer advice on what style of home would look best and where it should be sited.

Once construction begins, the buyers will enjoy a number of walk-throughs during the process, and once the home is completed, they'll deal with the same people – the company doesn't outsource its homeowner warranties.

Classic Homes of Maryland didn't just impress Maryland buyers – the company's commitment to charity also caught the attention of the popular "Extreme Makeover" show, which selected the company to build a home for a Poolesville family of 14 children. The company did – in just five days – and the episode aired last fall.

Classic Homes also won the 2009 Builder of the Year award from Montgomery County's affordable housing commission, and it was featured on the cable show "Builder's Showcase."

"We're just a family of builders, and as a result of being a family, we relate to the families who come to us," Jain says. •