

# REAL ESTATE

*A guide to home buying and selling*

*"Most of what we're concerned with is hidden in the walls. It's much more cost-effective to outfit the home while it's being constructed. Retrofitting is messy, costly and sometimes impossible."*

Erik Kudlis, president of Erik's Design-Build Associates



SEAN D. ELLIOT / The Day

■ This model home on Joshua Valley Road in East Lyme includes a variety of energy-saving and technological features.

## A MODERN MODEL HOME

*Builder puts technology in forefront at open houses*

By AMY JAY BARRY  
Special to The Day

**E**NVISION THIS: YOU ARE IN YOUR SPACIOUS new kitchen, preparing dinner, when the doorbell rings. You grab the remote control for the small countertop TV and, with one quick click, are able to see who is at the door. It's the delivery person with the order of groceries you placed by pressing some icons on a computer screen on the front of the refrigerator, after it had informed you that you were low on eggs and milk and out of orange juice.

Meanwhile, your spouse is in the upstairs home office on a live video conference call with a client in California. Your daughter is e-mailing a pen pal in Australia from the computer in her room and your mother-in-law is enjoying a therapeutic whirlpool bath while listening to opera through a stereo sound system that is wired throughout the home.

See **MODEL HOME** on F6



■ The home is graced with hardwood floors and large, energy-efficient windows.



# Model home includes the latest technology

From F1

Sound like a scene from the future? Well, it's not. Erik's Design-Build Associates of Jewett City is currently building such technologically advanced homes all along the southeastern Connecticut shoreline.

Their newest state-of-the-art model home, a 3,474-square-foot (Colonial?? Contemporary??) on Joshua Valley Road in East Lyme, will be open for public perusal this Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 19 and 20, and again the weekend of Aug. 26 and 27. It is one of nine houses being built on the road, several of which have already been sold. The price for this one is \$498,000.

"The information age is taking us over," says Erik Kudlis, EDB's president, "and

home automation and information technology is well on its way to becoming a standard requirement for new homes. Yet very few homes are built with any significant foresight as to what they need in order to take advantage of available technology.

"Most builders are still building homes the way they did 10 years ago," adds Kudlis, a two-time Eastern Connecticut Home Builder of the Year. "We're trying to build tomorrow's homes today."

Kudlis says homeowners might not notice much of a difference between his construction techniques and others', but that is just the point.

"Most of what we're concerned with is hidden in the walls. It's much more cost-ef-

fective to outfit the home while it's being constructed. Retrofitting is messy, costly and sometimes impossible. And resale is significantly higher on these homes."

"People moving into this area are highly technical," points out Bill Kudelchuk, EDB's office manager and technology specialist. "Many Pfizer and Sonalyst executives are being relocated here and are working from their homes."

He explains that their clients want to simply move in and plug in, and that EDB makes it easy for them by having the entire home pre-wired.

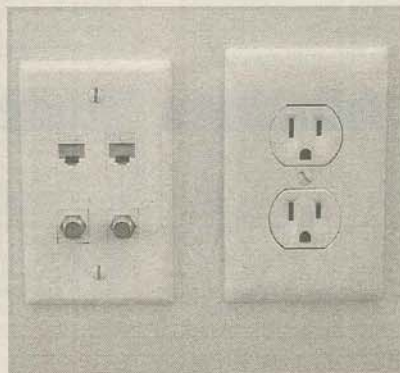
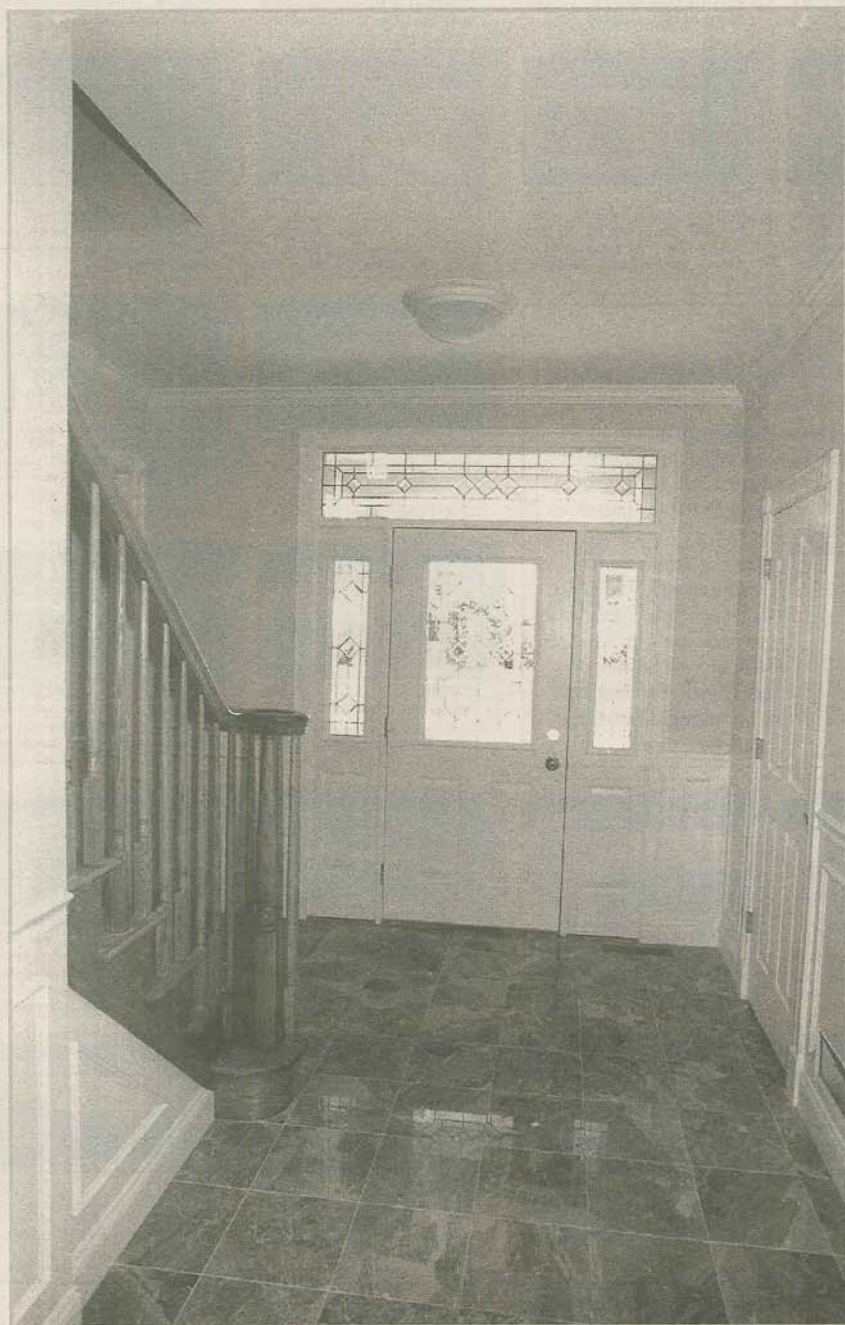
"We work with Southern New England Telephone and Eastern Connecticut Cable to deal with all of their concerns," Kudelchuk continues.

## Energy-saving designs

Besides being technologically ready, EDB is designing all of their new upscale homes as Energy Star homes. This means they meet stringent Department of Environmental Protection certification standards, administered by the Department of Public Utilities and Northeast Utilities/Connecticut Light and Power. They use 30 percent less energy than homes that simply meet Model Energy Code requirements.

This includes upgraded heating, air-conditioning and water-heating equipment, improved indoor air quality and energy-ef-

See **EAST LYME** on F8



■ **Top left:** The entry foyer of a model home on Joshua Valley Road in East Lyme.

■ **Above:** The fireplace featured elaborately detailed marble.

■ **Left:** Computer and coaxial data connections are installed alongside electrical outlets.



# Many affairs of the heart start in the home

## Sex and Real Estate

Why We Love Houses

By Marjorie Garber

243 pages. Pantheon Books. \$23.

N.Y. Times News Service

Sex and real estate? For many aging baby boomers, the scholar Marjorie Garber argues in her new book, real estate now occupies the place in their brains once reserved for sex: They fantasize not about the perfect mate, but about parquet floors and 12-foot ceilings, and kitchens with Viking stoves; their favorite pornography consists of *Architectural Digest* and *House and Garden*.

Buying and selling a house, she says in "Sex and Real Estate," is a lot like dating: "the same emotional overinvestment; the same daydreaming; the same quickening of the pulse; the lingering around the phone, willing it to ring."

She points out that the vocabulary of real estate ads is "flirty, seductive, a come-on" ("Prewar Beauty," "Light & Lovely on West End Avenue"), and that buyers use similar language in contemplating a purchase: they talk about making "an offer" — a proposal — for a property or wanting "to see it again."

Open houses play the role of mixers for prospective buyers; and sellers, having had their properties rejected once too often, speak of getting them "face-lifts" or "makeovers."

Despite such entertaining asides, Garber's book turns out to have little to do with sex and real estate. It's really a hodgepodge of essays — some better than others — about

houses and the role that houses play in our cultural imagination. Although the book retraces much of the ground covered by Witold Rybczynski's classic 1986 book, "Home: A Short History of an Idea," it does so with considerably less coherence and charm. It also lacks the cogency and sociological depth of Garber's 1992 study of cross-dressing ("Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety"), substituting anecdotes and assertions for sustained analysis.

By far the strongest sections of "Sex and Real Estate" are those that are grounded in detailed social observation and the familiarity of the author, a professor of English at Harvard University, with American literature. Garber points out that the phenomenon of the "trophy house" is not something new that started with the likes of Donald Trump or Bill Gates, but something as old as the American dream.

She observes that William Dean Howells' novel "The Rise of Silas Lapham" depicts an upwardly mobile Boston businessman whose plans to build an expensive house have the object of making good marriages for his daughters. She notes that "The Great Gatsby" includes some "unerringly apt descriptions of vernacular architecture as the sign and symbol of cultural desire."

Concurrent with Americans' mania for bigger and better houses, Garber argues, is a nostalgia for history and the vanished past. In earlier decades, William Randolph Hearst and Isabella Stewart Gardner stocked their mansions with expensive treasures imported from Europe, while the slightly less wealthy settled for living in Elizabethan-style manors and castlelike mansions. Today the aura of history is available to just about anybody with ac-

cess to catalogs from Pottery Barn or Restoration Hardware, which sell everything from antique-style hardware to lightly distressed furniture to folk-art reproductions.

In some communities, Garber writes, a battle has emerged between individuality and authenticity. In the historical district of Cambridge, Mass., she reports, homeowners must get a "certificate of appropriateness" for any significant changes to their houses, and on Nantucket, local hardware stores display placards showing the half-dozen or so historically correct colors that people are permitted to paint their homes.

It is in the chapters where Garber strays from the world of observation into the realm of philosophical speculation that this book begins to run aground. Her efforts to explore the metaphorical connection between the notions of "home" and "motherhood" (i.e. the house as womb, as a refuge of safety and comfort) feel vague and pretentious, as do her attempts to explicate the metaphor of the "house as body" or container for the soul.

"If 'the house' is a major internalized image," Garber writes in one particularly labored passage, "it is a second-order image, derived from myth, art, folklore, psychology and phenomenology — and from the concurrent development of what might be called the consumer unconscious, that is, the strategies of advertisement and merchandising that accompany or anticipate expansion in real estate and in the selling of high-end household goods and services."

These sorts of remarks, representing the worst kind of academic pontification, do nothing to illuminate Garber's subject. Rather, they obscure the more interesting and valid points she wants to make in this lumpy and uneven book.

## Fannie Mae's decision to end program could boost cost of borrowing

From F1

of reverse mortgages pay off earlier than expected—either through death or a move by the borrower to another house—the combined 10 percent equity share, plus other fees and interest charges, can push total costs to eye-popping levels. For example, the Web site of the nonprofit National Center for Home Equity Conversion ([www.reverse.org](http://www.reverse.org)), estimates that a 75-year-old woman paying off early in the third year of a Fannie Mae equity-share loan on a \$200,000 home would owe the equivalent of a 34.7 percent annual financing charge.

More extreme examples are also available.

A 62-year-old woman who took out a \$28,810 lump sum equity share loan against her \$170,000 house in a market ap-

preciating at just 4 percent per year, would owe the lender \$44,138 after two years—an effective annual financing cost rate of 23.8 percent.

But, under a quirk of Fannie Mae's program, she would owe an extra \$18,387 on the first day of the third year, pushing her total debt to \$62,526. Her rate of effective annual cost would now be a shocking 47.3 percent.

And, because of what critics charge has been inadequate disclosure of this cost "bubble," the borrower may not have understood how costly her Fannie Mae loan could prove to be.

In a reverse mortgage, seniors pledge their homes as collateral for cash advances from a lender—either in a lump sum, periodic payments or a credit line.

Typically the total loan amount plus interest and fees need not be repaid until the

senior dies, moves out or sells the home. The equity-share feature, added to Fannie Mae's "HomeKeeper" program in 1996, offers the borrower substantially higher initial cash payouts in exchange for up to the 10 percent share of the home's value at sale.

Though Fannie Mae's head of reverse mortgages, Elizabeth Scholz, insists the program was designed to put more money into seniors' hands, she concedes that a combination of high home appreciation rates over the last several years, plus more frequent early payoffs than anticipated, have resulted in higher-than-expected costs for some borrowers.

In an interview, Scholz said that Fannie has "just under 3,000" HomeKeeper equity-share mortgages in its portfolio, and that "less than 100" had prepaid early in their terms. She added that the firm has re-

ceived a small number of consumer complaints about the size of payoff fees. For those and other consumers who feel they have paid too much, said Scholz, "upon inquiry we will look at (their situations) and attempt to accommodate them."

"We want to do the right thing" for seniors, she emphasized. "We are looking at making some adjustments to the fee."

Scholz would not discuss specific financial remedies for aggrieved seniors. But one large lender facing similar criticism over high fees charged on reverse mortgages, GMAC Mortgage Corp., recently sent refund checks to borrowers it felt had paid too much. In one case, 62-year-old Irene Eichel of Los Angeles received a \$62,383 refund on a loan that carried a 29 percent effective annual cost—considerably lower than the potential cost that some of Fannie Mae's mortgages carry.

## East Lyme model home incorporates energy-efficient features

From F6

ficent lighting and appliances.

In addition, EDB is wrapping its homes entirely in foam as part of their "Healthy Home" package.

"Since energy studies show that even well-insulated homes lose as much as 42 percent of heating btu's through wall framing, we began using foam to minimize this loss of energy," says EDB designer Chad Whitcomb.

"The foam also provides health benefits," he adds. "It minimizes the chance of water vapors condensing in the wall cavity in cold weather, which can promote mold or mildew growth, contributing to allergies and respiratory problems. And it's much quieter inside because exterior noise

strikes the foam and is absorbed rather than radiated into the house through the framing and drywall."

### Handsome as well as high-tech

Surprisingly, design integrity and detail hasn't been sacrificed to all this cutting-edge technology.

The luxurious, traditional home is handsomely proportioned with fine architectural lines and attractive peaks and gables. It boasts an elegant, sweeping foyer with Italian marble floors.

Throughout the downstairs are 9-foot ceilings, multiple crown moldings, paneled wainscot walls, oak floors contrasted with walnut "racing stripe" inlays and oversized 3- by 5½-foot-high windows that bring lots of natural light into the home.

The gourmet kitchen features granite countertops, antique white beaded paneled cabinets and a fully tiled wallsplash, as well as a large center island and color-coordinated appliances.

An oak staircase leads to the second floor, where there are four bedrooms and two baths, including a master suite with sky-lit, vaulted ceilings, a private sitting room or office area and a walk-in closet/dressing room.

"We try to customize our homes for our clients," Kudelchuk says. "We talk about their likes, dislikes, whether they have children, etc., and do whatever we can — both structurally and technically — to accommodate their needs and enhance their lifestyles."

"In our newest homes, our emphasis has

shifted toward healthy living, comfort, convenience, quality of life, simplified maintenance and being prepared for future technological change."

### HOUSE TOURS

The model home will be open Saturday and Sunday, August 19 and 20 and August 26 and 27, from noon to 4 p.m. on Joshua Valley Road in East Lyme. There will be demonstrations of the latest in home technology, including home theater, computer and security systems. Reservations are not needed. For additional information and directions, call EDB at 1-800-339-4967.