



4th bedroom becomes standard

Extra space is often used for a home office and adds resale value

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KATE GOODLOE/Special Contributor

Homebuyers don't need to have three children, frequent in-law visits or a home-based business to appreciate a fourth bedroom anymore.

Four bedrooms are quickly becoming standard in the Dallas home market, real estate agents and builders said. They give families flexible living space and add value when it's time to resell.

Karen Marti Hale, a Realtor with Virginia Cook Realtors in Dallas, said she's seen fourth bedrooms turned into playrooms, hobby rooms, media rooms, rooms for cats — even a ballet studio with hardwood floors, mirrored walls and a bar for practice.

“There's always something,” she said.

But buyers would be wise to consider future use and resale value when they make decisions.

The most important is to ensure that the room can still be used as a bedroom. That means keeping the closet intact whatever the room's current use, Ms. Marti Hale said.

Windows are important, too.

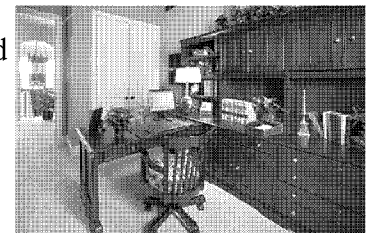
Unlike other rooms, bedrooms are generally required to have a fire escape route. Usually, that's a window, said Selso Mata, chief building official for the city of Plano. (And that's not the only safety requirement — municipalities also call for smoke detectors in all bedrooms, he said.)

Bathrooms also count. Last year, the average new home in Dallas had four bedrooms and two baths. This year, the average is four bedrooms and three baths, according to Centex Homes research.

To cope with that demand, Centex is adding bathrooms near secondary bedrooms. Lisa Suarez, director of strategic marketing for Centex, said a simple formula helps calculate how many bathrooms should be included. The master needs its own bath, she said. Add a second bedroom, add a bathroom. But two secondary bedrooms on the same floor can share a bath.

Few buyers think about that when deciding to convert a fourth bedroom to a media room or home office, where half-baths are common, Ms. Suarez said.

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Fourth bedrooms are almost an expectation in Dallas-area homes, say Realtors and builders. Buyers want the flexibility to use the space for a home office, playroom or media room.

“You want to keep the full bath [for a fourth bedroom] for resale purposes,” she said.

A fourth bedroom with a private bath is useful as an in-law suite, for children visiting from college or even as a dual master for couples where one spouse snores, Ms. Suarez said.

But for many buyers, the fourth bedroom will become a home office. Some couples are even turning two bedrooms into his-and-her offices, installing floor-to-ceiling cabinets and bookshelves, Ms. Marti Hale said. As long as the closet remains, the money buyers spend on such improvements is easy to recoup, she said.

If buyers choose a smaller home, they may have to take drastic steps to add space later, builders said.

Don Wimberly is the owner of Dallas-based Vanguard Construction, which focuses on remodeling homes. He’s not busy knocking out walls and demolishing bedrooms, he said. Instead, “we’re actually adding bedrooms,” he said.

“I built a few three-bedroom homes. But I’d never do it again.”