

Daily Herald

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## Homes Sunday



Morgante-Wilson Architects Ltd. of Evanston's innovative ceiling designs draw the eye through the entire room, not stopping at the walls.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MORGANTE-WILSON ARCHITECTS LTD.

## Things seem to be looking up

*Ceilings of today can be as fancy as floors*

By JEAN MURPHY  
Daily Herald Correspondent

Generally speaking, Americans have not been accustomed to looking up when they walk into a room, unless they are in a church or another impressive public space.

Within a home, ceilings have typically been taken for granted. They may have had a lot of volume or some crown molding here and there, but they have been largely taken for granted and painted "ceiling white" in the majority of homes.

Today, however, builders, interior designers and architects are convincing their new home clients that ceilings are another surface to be treated with an interesting look.

"We started with doing interesting things on the ceilings of our clients' bedrooms because, after all, you are lying on your back in there, looking up," said Elissa Morgante, principal of Morgante-Wilson Architects Ltd. of Evanston. "At first we were creating traditional coffered ceilings to put texture on the ceiling."

Coffered ceilings are created using one-inch wide pieces of wood, laid out in a grid pattern across the entire space.

"Then we started mortaring thin pieces of brick onto the ceilings of kitchens, in particular, which has a huge and unique impact on a room," Morgante said. "Suddenly, instead of just stopping at the walls, your eye scans the entire room."

"It has taken awhile, but this kind of design is on the rise in the United States because there are more people now who are interested in having eye-catching designs on both their walls and their ceilings," she said. "Today there is no 'normal' in a

home. Everything is up for grabs and consideration in home design, just like it is in fashion."

Morgante-Wilson designers have put everything from detailed wood beams to curved lattice, medallions, brick, wallpaper and show-stopping light fixtures on the ceilings of the homes they have designed and decorated in recent years.

"Our clients want their homes to be their sanctuaries — the most wonderful place they are on a daily basis — so they want everything to be carefully considered and designed," Morgante said.

In fact, even the surfaces of the ceilings themselves are often built to incorporate unique designs using groin vaults like you would see in a Tudor home and many other volume ceiling options.

Nicole Jurjovec, broker with John Greene Realtor in Naperville, agreed.

"The standard for ceilings has been set much higher over the past ten years. Architects, builders and buyers all want to incorporate awesome architectural features on their ceilings because they add so much beauty."

"I have been seeing real barn beams on ceilings, as well as beadboard in kitchens and covered porches and vaulted and coffered ceilings everywhere. Many people who are buying new homes even want volume ceilings in their secondary bedrooms because they make the rooms feel very large," Jurjovec said.

"Most of today's home designs feature an open floor plan and unique ceiling treatments can provide a subtle, yet attractive, delineation between the kitchen and the great room, for instance," she added.

"While most of my clients are still painting their ceilings white and are shying away from bold colors and faux finishes, they are looking for accents like crown molding and beams, as well as outstanding light fixtures which they consider to be the jewelry of the home," Jurjovec said. "Homeowners realize they can get even more creative when contrasting fixtures against an accented ceiling."

Brian Brunhofer, president of Meritus Custom Builders of Deerfield, agreed that he, too, has seen many buyers who are looking for additional architectural detailing on their ceilings, whether they are in formal or informal homes.

"When a ceiling features volume and/or extra architectural details, they see it as a statement piece. They are asking us to use decorative trim to create something unique for them," he said.

For the most part, Brunhofer said he has been seeing coffered ceilings in family rooms and dens, boxed tray ceilings in living and dining rooms and medallions over eating areas. Crown molding, other types of trim and sometimes different paint colors are used to accent ceiling breaks in the trays.

"Much of what we are doing in today's suburban markets are trends that began in the city. Buyers don't want as much square footage in their homes, but they want special elements that will make their homes comfortable, interesting and unique," he said.

"Custom woodwork and carpentry features add those special touches that stand out to a buyer in a high caliber home and can really be a design element that sets the



The circular beam pattern and light fixtures are the focal point of this elegant living room.

tone for the entire room," Brunhofer said.

Lexington Homes is also incorporating unique design elements in the ceilings of their custom-designed homes at Woodleaf at The Sanctuary Club in Kildeer and at the Lexington Hills townhouse project in Palatine.

"We have added reclaimed wood beams as accents, coffered ceilings in interesting, non-grid patterns and tray ceilings accented with stained

or painted crown molding," said Denise Benach, director of interior design for Lexington Homes. "And we are offering volume ceilings in homes of all price ranges because ceilings have become so important to buyers."

"We are even seeing people choosing to have stained beams and decorative ceiling trims with white walls. They are using the wood accents for interest instead of choosing colored walls," she said.