

RealTrends: The Thousand Special Advertising Feature



# The New Luxury Checklist

*Buyer priorities have shifted — here's what real estate experts say is attracting the most discerning house hunters*

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by Kelly Bryant

Not long ago, luxury living was measured in dedicated home theaters, chef's kitchens, personalized private gyms and a seemingly endless list of headline-grabbing amenities. Bigger often meant better— and more almost always meant more impressive.

Today, buyers are approaching luxury differently. The newest status symbol may not be a room built for a single purpose, but rather spaces that work harder, adapt more easily and quietly improve everyday life.

Meghan Barry is the president of Who's Who in Luxury Real Estate, a network of top real estate companies that represent some of the most expensive properties around the world. From her perspective, while high-net-worth buyers have seemingly endless options when it comes to must-have features, it's flexible living that really stands out.

"Floor plan flow trends may evolve, but today people are drawn to homes that will grow with them; through starting a family, working in or out of the home, changing activities and hobbies, and even needing space for staff who enable aging in place," she says. "Spaces need to be able to pivot with the changing demands of a life well-lived."

Barry points to one of her favorite homes currently on the market in Seattle, where her office is headquartered. It's a waterfront property with a particularly thoughtful design. Among its coveted features is a daylight basement that serves as

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a pool and beach cabana, theater and all-around rumpus room. Plus, it has two back-to-back powder rooms. All of this was planned out with guest comfort in mind.

In terms of smart technology, buyers want all of the bells and whistles, but designed in a more discreet way that blends seamlessly into the background.

“Most renovated or newer luxury properties have some sort of ‘tech hub’ for managing an array of systems throughout the home, such as wireless, entry access, smart appliances, security systems, heating, lighting, a safe room and the list goes on,” Barry says. “For the high-profile homeowner, a robust infrastructure is a must. Everything else can be changed based on their tastes and trends.”

## A HEALTHY OUTLOOK

Cindy Scholz is the founder of the Family Office Division at Compass and a real estate broker helping buyers find their dream homes in both New York City and the Hamptons. In these markets, she says, wellness amenities aren't just nice-to-haves but must-haves in 2026.

“The idea of self-care and having 24/7 access to it has really increased since COVID-19,” Scholz says. “People prefer to enjoy this in the privacy of their homes. We’re even seeing a shortage of personal chefs in the Hamptons more than we’ve ever seen before. They’re almost impossible to find over the summer because they are so in demand.”

In terms of what she’s advising sellers to consider when putting their homes on the market, that looks a little different, too.

“I would say number one is texturizing the walls,” Scholz says. “People don’t want to walk into a blank canvas anymore, and I think that is one of the easiest things that someone can do. Another thing is landscaping— it’s the necklace on a house, and people tend to overlook it. But then some buyers are scared about what the price could be to landscape it themselves. It tends to be the last thing that people want to invest in when it really should be the first thing.”

In today’s market, she notes it can take two years to sell a house priced over \$10 million in the Hamptons, and these easy tweaks can resonate with buyers, potentially setting the stage for a smoother, speedier sale. Because in a world in which every day can bring new twists and turns, one thing remains the same— smart buyers want a home that works for them, not against them.

*Kelly Bryant is a freelance writer in Los Angeles specializing in real estate and lifestyle topics.*

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