

# One Man's Mansion is Another's Bungalow

By Camilla McLaughlin

**As we celebrate the most expensive homes for sale in the U.S., we take a look at what's changing in these houses, as well as which characteristics are most desired. And we start by wondering what to call a "mansion" these days.**

For years, *mansion*, which traces back to *mansio*, Latin for dwelling, was the word most frequently used in reference to a large, stately house. Today, the term *mansion* seems to be affixed to almost any substantial residence from a large home in an average neighborhood, often dubbed *McMansions*, to newly constructed, opulent estates.

"I think the term *mansion* is specific to culture and location, and, in the U.S., has been replaced with more specific descriptions," shares Paul Boomsma, president, Luxury Portfolio International and COO, LeadingRE. "*Mansion* has gone the way of saying 'he's a millionaire,' in the U.S. anyway."

The building binge that began in the 1990s significantly upped the size of homes and produced quite a few in the 4,000- to 5,000-square-foot range, often in typical neighborhoods. They were quickly dubbed *McMansions*, which took on a derogatory tone. And that, more than post-recession attitudes regarding displays of affluence, led to the downfall of *mansion*. "I think the term *mansion* was devalued by *McMansion*," says Boomsma.

"When we talk about homes with our clients, we never use the word *mansion*, and they never use the word *mansion*," says architect Richard Landry, founder and president of Landry Design Group. "They want a home, and it's a home that a family lives in. And the home might get large in terms of square footage because of their requirements. I want people to focus on the qualities of the home, the architecture, the ideas behind it, what influenced it, what makes it special and not whether to call it a *villa*, *bungalow*, *home* or a *mansion*. I don't think that's very relevant."

Clearly, among the wealthy, even the term *mansion* has become a tad passé unless one is perhaps referring to a classic estate, one typically constructed before 1939 in cities and prime resort destinations such as Newport, Rhode Island. "Because Newport

holds a position of importance in American history in general, and certainly during the Gilded Age, there will always be interest in and demand for its exceptional estates," explains Melanie Delman, president of Lila Delman Real Estate in Newport. "They occupy the most coveted locations, whether along the dramatic Atlantic Coast or in town within walking distance of the vibrant harbor front. Often, they were designed by significant architects and occupied by families of note. Many current owners consider themselves stewards of properties that represent both art and history. In some instances, what may change is allocation of spaces to suit current lifestyles."

In China and parts of Asia, *bungalow*, along with *villa*, are terms often used for very large homes; in other regions, *chateau*, *manor house* or *mansion* might be preferred, while a *bungalow* would be a small, one-story dwelling. Nothing better illustrates the shifting semantics of large homes than these examples.

And while the affluent may be reluctant to use the term *mansion* when it comes to their own dwellings, that doesn't imply any lessening of the desire to own one. Clearly, luxury residences in premium settings have not lost their luster; for evidence, one only has to look at the volume of sales at the very top of the market. "It is a very interesting market. There is so much international money coming in. The demands for the big, fabulous home are growing," says Ann Dashiell, director of the Estates Division at Rodeo Realty. "People are very private. They want big and they want safe," she says, noting estates with 10 acres or more are in demand.

Among the very wealthy, real estate continues to be a delineator. As one client summed it up for William P.D. Pierce, a Previews Property Specialist with Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate in Miami, "Real estate really defines who the person is. Show me their real estate and I will tell you who they are."

"I think that 1 percent of America still wants a

## UNIQUE HOMES REPORTS:

What is the High End?

The third in a six-part series dissecting the who, what, why, where and how of luxury in 2015.



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A Mediterranean Revival Residence in Los Angeles reflects Southern California's preferred architectural style although contemporary has become more in demand.

Although square footage continues to increase, sheer space is a very small part of what elevates a residence. "High-net-worth individuals are seeking private, secure properties with amenities that meet their concept of a quality lifestyle. Christie's International Real Estate uses the words *beauty*, *art* and *provenance* when discussing the most extraordinary properties in the world, and the lifestyle they afford," explains Delman.

Characteristics such as an enviable location, excellent architecture and a noted architect — all credentials of historic estates — remain as essentials. Important too is presence, how the property appears when first approached, a characteristic most homes in our Ultimate category share. It's no coincidence that typical descriptions of notable properties almost always begin with the arrival, the entry and how the residence appears at first glance.

Another essential, according to Delman, is *continued on page 114*



The exterior of this Cape Cod home follows the architectural lineage of the Shingle-style homes that once populated coastal New England.



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quality of life. "The ability to exercise, work and relax all in one location is key. Therefore, workout facilities, office space, well appointed bedrooms and baths, ample garage space and exceptional indoor and outdoor entertaining spaces for family and friends are highly desirable," she explains.

Even more than during the Gilded Age, today's mansions are designed to be a refuge. For example, Palazzo Di Amore, which Rey has listed for \$195 million, goes beyond the typical amenities of pool, spa and tennis courts with a discotheque/ballroom that includes a state-of-the-art laser light system and a revolving dance floor located in a dramatic, separate 15,000-square-foot entertainment complex. The theater seats more than 50 people. And for live stage shows, there is a dressing room. A vineyard on the property produces 400 to 500 cases a year of the estate's private label. Even parking is supersized with space for 150 cars.

What's missing from today's estate homes are extensive spaces for staff, which used to be an essential for any estate. It's also another reason why "mansion" might seem a little bit last century. "Mansion implies upkeep and maintenance and today's lifestyle is much less staff intensive," observes Boomsma. Instead of a large staff, one might have a household manager who ensures the various tasks are done, but it is much less labor intensive than it used to be.

A recently constructed New World mansion, Le Palais Royal, located in Hillsboro Beach, Florida, integrates a high level of technology, so many tasks that formerly would have been completely performed by staff are automatic. Computers manage the pool, fountains, even a 1,300-gallon aquarium in the family room and also run daily checks on the systems. Pierce says everything at Le Palais Royal was designed with maintenance in mind. The property also illustrates the level of detail that goes into a modern-day estate. For example, a music producer was consulted on the design of the audio system, while the FBI was a resource for security.

The architecture of estate homes today is also undergoing subtle change. "There is a cleansing going on, where the interiors become simpler," shares Landry.

"Contemporary architecture has become popular here, which is an interesting trend. Ten to 15 years ago you could not sell a contemporary house," says Rey.

"We do a lot more contemporary work than we did in the past. Now we are seeing very large, high-quality contemporary homes being built for very high value with very high-quality details," says Landry.

In the past, consumers found comfort in the timeless appeal of traditional architecture rooted in history. Now Landry and other architects report that even when they do traditional homes, the clients want more contemporary interiors. "So more and more we are mixing the two, which means they can still have walls of rubble stone on the exterior but have modern detailing inside," observes Landry.

"People often want more traditional character to the exterior of their homes. In this case, it is our goal to design something that is unique, but also participates in historic lineage. This desire for both unique and familiar requires a more subtle design scenario that accepts historic patterns as opposed to revolutionary break," says John DaSilva, design principal at Polhemus Savery DaSilva Architects and Builders in Chatham, Massachusetts. He notes that changes in architectural solutions to lifestyle need to happen over generations, not over years. He uses the example of open plan living versus closed, contained rooms. "That's something that started 100 years ago or more. It's not what everyone wants, but that's what most of our clients want."

Another change in the world of mansions comes from consumers who are more knowledgeable about design and architecture. And once people educate themselves to good architecture, they seek out better architects, says Landry. In the end, this builds even greater appreciation for the architecture itself, making the semantics somewhat superfluous. **UH**

### THE HIGH END FOR RENT?

When it came to estates, a man's home really was his castle. At least it used to be. Today, many of those castles can be leased. The rents are high, often ranging from \$200,000 to as much as \$700,000 per month.

This is true in Beverly Hills and also in some resort locales, although the dollar figures may be less than in California. Some who take advantage of this option in Beverly Hills might be in the area for a length of time, but not long enough to justify a purchase. Others might opt for this alternative because they just can't find the right property.

No matter the specifics, just having these one-of-kind estates available for lease is a huge shift in the ultra high end. Many owners have multiple homes, so this is often not a situation of opening the doors to a sacrosanct abode. It also reflects ways in which attitudes regarding real estate have changed, which means that increasingly, ultra-high-net-worth individuals place a great value on the investment potential of residential real estate.

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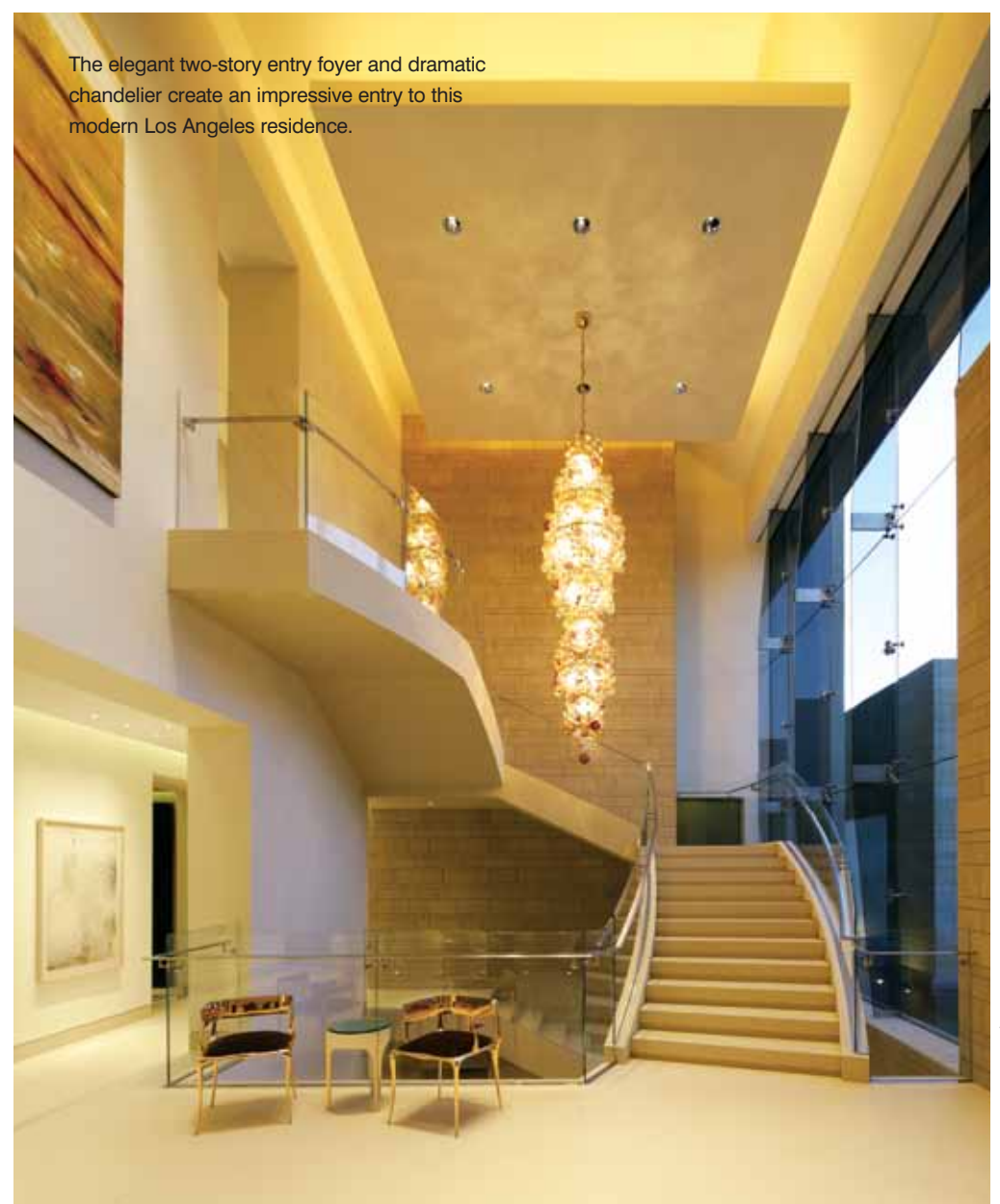
mansion. They want a statement to their success," says Allie Beth Allman, founder and CEO of Allie Beth Allman and Associates in Dallas.

One thing that has changed in the mansion world is size. Looking back at legendary properties in Beverly Hills, Jeff Hyland, president of the Beverly Hills brokerage, Hilton & Hyland, says many of the old mansions were only about 5,000 to 7,000 square feet. Today, he says, to qualify for "mansion" status, 25,000 square feet might be required. Still, even size is relative. For someone accustomed to 25,000 square feet and larger, 10,000 may be a downsized home and for someone else occupying a 7,000-square-foot home, 10,000 may be perceived as a mansion.

Square footage is as much function of lifestyle as it is a measure of status. "The high-end real estate market is very individual, so you see a wide diversity in taste and in what people are looking for. The reason large mansions are popular is there are many high-net-worth individuals who have large entourages and large families, so out of necessity, they are looking for large square footage," explains Joyce Rey, executive director of Coldwell Banker Previews International, whose portfolio of listings includes both New World and Old World mansions, including the most expensive home currently on the market in the U.S.

"We have clients with multiple generations in the same house. Their children, their parents and their grandparents all in the same house. There are also people with an extended family from out of state or the country who come with their kids for an extended period of time, and they want to provide for them," says Landry.

Another important lifestyle consideration is philanthropy and the ability to accommodate large charitable events. So, ample room for gatherings, possibly as large as several hundred people or more, is another factor determining size and function, even if the overall ambiance of the home is less formal than it would have been even 10 years ago.



The elegant two-story entry foyer and dramatic chandelier create an impressive entry to this modern Los Angeles residence.

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