

# Developers strive for a community feel

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By **CHARISSA N. TERRANOVA** / Special Contributor

A design renaissance is afoot, and it's strutting through Dallas. Two developments under construction, Urban Reserve at Central and Forest and Kessler Woods in Kessler Park, throw over cookie-cutter "McMansion" style for eco-conscious contemporary design.



Vernon Bryant / DMN

**Developer Matt Holley at his home in Kessler Woods, where cantilevered and interlocked designs prevail.**

Diane Cheatham of Urban Reserve and Matt Holley of Kessler Woods are prime movers behind this renaissance, bringing a touch of the well-ordered and functional form of the German Bauhaus to Dallas.

Ms. Cheatham is emphatic about using thoughtful design as a means to transform residential living. "I don't believe in gated communities," she says. "Urban Reserve is open and accessible. It is a neighborhood, not a subdivision."

The site planning at Urban Reserve is environmentally friendly: a 50-lot site zoned for single-family homes, 25 of which have been sold, that backs up to a DART line. The streets have been narrowed to 22 feet, from the 36-foot standard, to minimize impermeable surfaces. "Rain gardens," 2-foot-wide shallow gullies on the east side of the streets, harvest rainwater, protecting White Rock Creek from pollution and runoff.

Driving up the main street of the site, aptly named Vanguard Way, the picturesque curve suggests that it could be any other development. The retro-chic of the

makeshift offices, two silver-bullet Airstream trailers, signify the promise of contemporary lifestyle, a much-watered-down version of Bauhaus social transformation, absent the class consciousness and revolutionary fervor.

Urban Reserve is a mixture of speculative development, with the surveyed lots ready for purchase, and design flexibility. Buyers can choose an architect from a ready list of architects, or propose an outside designer subject to approval by Urban Edge Developers Ltd.

This allows for diversity and individuation. The list of architects at Urban Reserve includes international and local names: Susan Appleton, BBK Architects, Bernbaum Magadini, Bodron + Fruit, Brent Brown, Russell Buchanan, Sergio Chavez, Elliott & Associates Architects, Maria Gomez, Douglas R. Koehne, Max Levy, Robert L. Meckfessel, Lionel Morrison, Dan Shipley, Vince Snyder, Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, and Jim Wiley.

### **Plan your life**

- Urban Reserve, Vanguard Way at Stults Road. Urban Edge Developers, 214-741-1600 or [www.urbanreserve.net](http://www.urbanreserve.net).
  - Kessler Woods, between North Oak Cliff Boulevard and Davis Street. 972-733-7543 (sales) or [www.kesslerwoodscourt.com](http://www.kesslerwoodscourt.com).
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Ms. Cheatham projects the neighborhood will be complete in 2009. For now there are a few boxy skeletons, foundations, several open lots, two manicured ponds and the winding vertebral passage of Vanguard Way.

Distancing the project from nostalgic quotation of modernism past, Ms. Cheatham declares that "architecture must be of its time and of its place." Though Urban Reserve will be thoroughly of our moment, its curving road and survey of contemporary designers brings to mind the Weissenhof Siedlung of 1927, an experimental housing development in Stuttgart, Germany, meant to educate the public about form and functionalism with houses by the masters of modernism, including Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius.

Closer to completion, Mr. Holley's Kessler Woods takes its design cues from the surrounding midcentury modern homes of Kessler Park, with design precedents in the 1950s Case Study Houses of Los Angeles and Eichler Homes of the Bay Area. Neighbors have perceived his rising houses differently. "A building inspector came out to inspect the site," Mr. Holley says, "after neighbors had complained that an office complex was going up in Kessler Park."

Like the architecture of those California developments, the houses of Kessler Woods hew close to the landscape: two steeply rolling hills offering skyline views bifurcated by a creek. There is direct access to the Twelve Hills Nature Center next door. Within the site, the embedded quality of the completed houses creates a dialogue in form, with buildings on adjacent lots knit closely together. Forms cantilever and interlock as though so many layered and stacked Froebel blocks, the toys of a toddling Frank Lloyd Wright. Mr. Holley says that the density is "a vehicle for community, with the houses relating to one another" as people do.



**Diane Cheatham outside a building under construction at Urban Reserve.**

Vernon Bryant / DMN

Kessler Woods offers a balance of spec development and design flexibility similar to Urban Reserve. The sites are preconfigured and buyers can choose an architect from a list or bring an outsider subject to approval. The architects of Kessler Woods tend to be mostly Texan with the exception of one Colombian-born: Hammer + Partners, Clifford Welch Architect, Talley Associates, Maria Helena Cruz (Colombian), Jonathan Delcambre, Douglas Hildinger, Frank Welch, Russell Buchanan.

Kessler Woods boasts 30 lots for single-family homes in two phases, with a third phase for multiple-family development (apartments and townhouses). Four houses are finished and occupied at the site, one by Mr. Holley. Designed by Hammer + Partners, his three-story is 4,300 square feet on an 8,000-square-foot lot. Inspired by Wright's Falling Water in Mill Run, Pa., the plan pinwheels around a core of stacked fireplaces in a steel-frame cage clad in narrow-faced taupe bricks.

The sense of lifestyle comes more replete at Kessler Woods as homeowners can purchase their houses with furniture from B&B Italia and art from Goss Gallery in Dallas already installed.

*Charissa N. Terranova is a Dallas freelance writer.*