

If You Build It, Will They Buy?

Connecticut Home Builders
"Parade" Their Wares

Guilford's luxury townhouse/condominiums have a modern feel with exposed beams and ductwork in the main building, a converted industrial space originally built in the 1800s. Furniture used in staging is from the Madison Furniture Barn in Westbrook.

By Rachel Bergman





Kitchen's at Branford's 55+ community, Riverwalk, are spacious with high-end finishes.

On a recent fall Sunday in October, a group of Connecticut's home builders, remodelers and designers came together for the Parade of Homes, an event sponsored by the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Central Connecticut (HBRA). Four builders across five sites in North Haven, Branford and Guilford staged model homes in new developments ranging from the cozy to the luxurious to the simple and urbane for visitors to walk through while sipping California wine and nibbling a snack. Wine was provided by **ONEHOPE Foundation**, a Napa Valley wine sold exclusively by

independent sales consultants with portions of proceeds going to national or regional charities. Most of the wine is from Robert Mondavi vineyards. The Parade of Homes proceeds on any bottles sold will benefit Habitat for Humanity.

Participating builders included **Centerplan Communities** with their North Haven Community, Pierpont Hill, **The Horton Group LLC** with Guilford's new 66 High Street development in-progress, **DonMar Development Corp.** both with the 55+ Branford community Riverwalk and North Haven's Lexington Gardens, and **Vigliotti Construction Company's** 55+ community Summer Wind Estates. Contrary to popular

rhetoric, people are retiring in Connecticut—Riverwalk is already at almost 90% sold. Model homes were arranged with elegant touches provided by local designers like **Mary Ellen Sullivan** and **Susanna Smith**. Bathroom designs and outfitting in some locations was done by **Bender**. The sites ranged from high-end luxury living on the shoreline to mid-priced homes with open floor plans and sleek and stylish finishes. As one agent on site pointed out, with a new home, you're getting the best and newest of appliances, finishes, and energy efficiency, but an older home in Connecticut almost always needs a new kitchen, bathroom, and is heated with oil. Well, that's my house. . .

In Guilford, The Horton Group LLC converted an old mill built in 1884 at 66 High Street to modern industrial style condominiums with exposed beams and ductwork. Currently, the building is at 50% capacity and additional buildings on the site are in the works. The mill is comprised of fifteen units with prices ranging from \$625,000 to \$1.6million. While there are no restrictions relative to who can buy or move in, Nikki Travaglino, the selling agent with William Pitt Sotheby's Realty on site, described the current buyer profile as empty nesters or very close to that stage. The floor plans of the units even meet all ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)

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66 High's first completed building, the old factory, is at 50% capacity. Units first went on sale in August of this year.



High ceilings and lots of windows are part of the new units at Centerplan's Pierpont Hill in North Haven. Furniture and staging was done by PJ & Company Staging and Interior Design and photo by Dennis M. Carbo.

The 66 High complex is near the water, near the Guilford green and units feature open floor plans with ADA-compatible features.



Homes in the Riverwalk community feature cozy details like fireplaces, reading rooms and luxury first floor bathrooms.



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standards for design with slightly wider doors and enough floor space in places like bathrooms for a wheelchair to pivot and turn, designed for someone who would like to age in place. Guilford is a community better known for its active town green and craft fairs, not exactly its condo complexes, an unusual real estate option for the historic shoreline town, but the bug has hit the region and ultra urbane complexes are not just for the city anymore.

For the Parade of Homes event, available units were artfully staged with furniture from the **Madison Furniture Barn** in Westbrook. While it was very gracious of the selling agents to ply visitors with wine, donuts, and schwag bags with fancy water bottles, I wanted them to send me home with an industrial/modern side table.

Just south in Branford was DonMar's Riverwalk 55 and older community of detached homes set back from the road in a quiet and semi-private tree-lined setting. Kitchens run large in these homes and are designed for entertaining. The community was laid out with walking trails and outdoor community spaces, and association staff takes care of all maintenance like plowing, raking leaves, and lawn care.

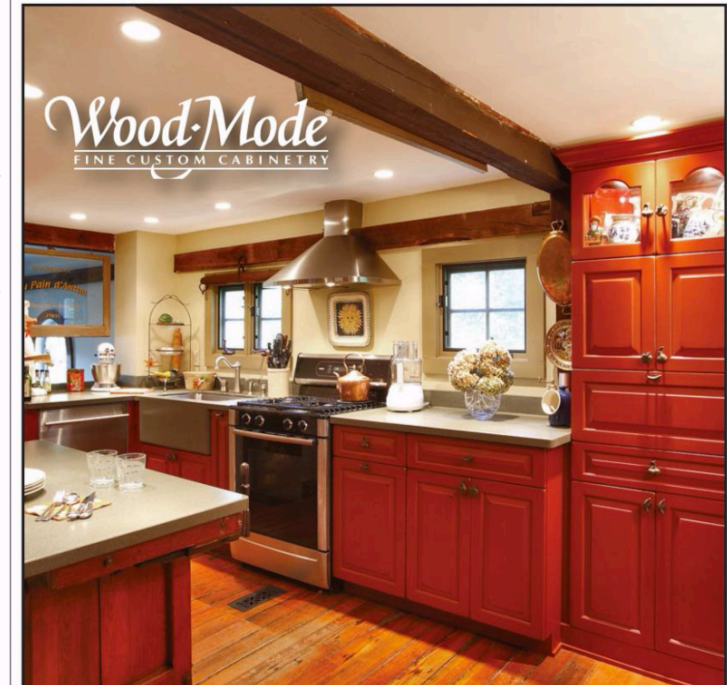
The other 55+ community on the list, North Haven's Summer Wind Estates, boasts scenic views in their maintenance-free community of detached homes, as well. Kitchens are outfitted with stone countertops, ceramic tile and stone countertops. There are no age restrictions at Pierpont, a scenic and wooded community in a great school district. It's the HGTV end-product home without the pesky nuisance of suffering

through a remodel. With professional design and high-end finishes, it *does* beat the equivalent older home in the same price range, perhaps a brown raised ranch with a pink bathtub?

Economic forecasters abound in the marketplace and some may consider it a comfort to see builders producing quality products with confidence for not-yet-found buyers. Settings for the residential developments are idyllic,

symmetrical and carefully crafted to meet modern expectations in a state where much of the housing stock is like its population: aging.

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