

LUXURY LIVING

Country living: Kingswood brings authentic take on classic English design to Charlotte

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Louise and Peter Leeke, owners of Kingswood Custom Homes, inside the design center at their office in Pineville.

Old World isn't old any more.

Kingswood Custom Homes — whose U.K.-native owners Peter and Louise Leeke have always brought authenticity to European design — is developing seven uniquely designed 19th century-styled cottages near Carmel Country Club.

Ockley Manor is nestled on a cul-de-sac on Green Rea Road with homes sized from 4,000 to 6,000 square feet, priced starting at \$1.5 million.

A European aesthetic has long attached itself to luxury home design. But those who remember the Old World homes of a decade ago — most complete with stone exterior, heavy beams, worn materials and even a turret befitting a castle — will find little in common with Kingswood’s take on classic English style.

“That forced old Europe look ran its course,” Leeke says. “Some builders did mortar oozing from brick joints. ‘Whereabouts in Europe is that?’ Leeke asks. “That look is gone.”

Luxury buyers are instead drawn to European style in the manner of the British Arts and Crafts movement, which celebrates the simplicity of shapes and materials, including metal, wood and glass. Ockley Manor is named for one of the oldest English villages in Surrey that Leeke used to drive through on the way to his parents’ home. The cluster of individual homes will be built with slate roofs, white-washed painted brick facades, reclaimed hardwood beams and wide-plank hardwood floors.

The Arts and Crafts movement was a fight against the industrialization of art and architecture at the turn of the 20th century.

Each single-family will have a unique exterior and individual floor plan. All of the homes are different exterior shapes, but they are designed to relate to one another. Continuity comes from sharing the same brick, slate roofs, window styles and paint schemes, arranged differently on each house.

The development plan also impacts the gardens. The design team has thought through how each home relates to the one next door, so that a view from a mudroom window will align with plantings in the yard and not look directly into the house next door. The design approach is to be neighborly.

The lines are clean and easy with a bit of romance added from steep or swooping roofs, gables and ivy on some exterior walls. While the exteriors of the homes are relatively fixed, inside buyers have the opportunity to make some changes and fully make their own selections.

The floor plans of all seven homes are similar. All but two have the possibility of a second bedroom or study downstairs. Most have a steam room as part of the luxury bath. Because so many buyers express an interest in living in one great room, special care has been taken to create kitchens exposed to the family room that don’t appear too industrial. Some functional but less attractive appliances, such as the microwave oven and coffee maker, are moved to an out-of-site butler’s pantry.

Owing to the site’s location within walking distance of Carmel Country Club, all of the homes have golf cart parking in the garage.

Among the first buyers in Ockley Manor are restaurateur Tom Hager and his wife, Karen. They’ve lived off Carmel Road for 23 years, remaining in a home that’s too big for them long after their children became adults, Hager says.

“We are delayed downsizers — well we’re kind of downsizing, but once we got the opportunity to work with Peter we wanted to make sure we had all of the things we were excited about in the home.”

Those amenities will include a pool.

Hager, who along with his nephew started the restaurant chain, Hickory Tavern, which has 24 locations, and CharBar7, with five locations, says staying in the Carmel Road area keeps him near his Ballantyne office, restaurant on Carmel Road and membership at Carmel Country Club.

“This is the heart of my area,” Hager says. “I like being close to Carmel Country Club. That’s where our social life will remain for the rest of our time in Charlotte.”

Leeke says all of the interest in Ockley Manor has come from members of Carmel Country Club. Many are baby boomers like the Hagers who are looking for smaller homes but don’t want to sacrifice on quality. Ockley Manor delivers both.

Kingswood Homes has built in Charlotte for 23 years and done very little spec building in recent years. But Leeke says demand for new construction in close-in locations is so strong the opportunity to build an enclave of multiple homes close to Carmel Country Club was too good to pass up.

It’s a different time than in 2009 when the recession prompted Kingswood Homes to open an office in Charleston, S.C., where renovation work was plentiful.

“Things were diabolically bad in the recession, and it was a very risky move to go to Charleston,” Leeke says. “We invested in advertising to build a brand when no one else was, and it proved to be the right thing to do.”

As the housing market recovered, Kingswood expanded to building new custom homes in the Kiawah Island development of Cassique, where he brought the British Arts and Crafts style to the Low Country.

Leeke has long had strong ties with professional athletes in Charlotte, who were also less affected by the decline of the economy, and kept Kingswood Homes busy in the recession. Leeke previously worked with former NFL Carolina Panthers wide receiver Muhsin “Moose” Muhammad on developing a neighborhood called The Estates at Soen. He’s currently building tight end Greg Olsen’s new home while doing charity work for Olsen’s foundation, The Heartest Yard.

“We have a 98% referral in our business,” Leeke says. “If you roll out the red carpet for your clients, you will be successful. We look after people and if you follow that philosophy success will follow you.”

