



**New American Home 2004** (left) has a concrete facade that gives it an industrial look; an area in the master bedroom (above) can be used as a sitting room, gym or home office.

## Loft Living in the Burbs

*Forgoing Many Interior Walls, New Homes Offer Vast Space; The 'Warehouse Look' Is In*

By QUEENA SOOK KIM

**F**OR AS LONG as memory can recall, builders have stayed true to the layout and design of the traditional home.

But at its annual convention next week in Las Vegas, the National Association of Home Builders will showcase the New American Home 2004, a stand-alone house that scraps the living and dining rooms for "flex space," or large, undefined areas. Concrete floors replace wood and carpet. The use of walls to define rooms is minimal. In short, the home builders' vision of the suburban home looks a lot like the urban loft.

A cottage industry for new-construction lofts has already popped up in suburban nation-

wide. One Phoenix builder is marketing newly built condominiums that have "the warehouse look," complete with exposed ductwork and sprinklers. In the tony Los Angeles suburb of Santa Monica, Palisades Development Group LLC constructed lofts that sold for up to \$250,000. Each structure includes entrances that roll up like industrial garage doors and outdoor lights that are shielded by a cage much like those found in forsaken alleys or jails.

Sponsored jointly by the home builders' association and *Builder* magazine, the New American Home project is aimed at capturing emerging trends in home building and the shifting lifestyles of Americans. New American Home 2004 is located in a wealthy Las Vegas suburb. The house has stylistic touches like staircases with cable handrails, but it isn't avant-garde or futuristic. Asking price: \$1.8 million.

The design of the Las Vegas loft house implies that formal entertaining is effectively dead by being away with separate dining and living rooms. Instead, it has a "great room" with the kitchen as its center. "How often do you really have cocktails in the living room?" asks Jian Ho, the home's interior designer. "Usually, you stand around a kitchen with a drink while the host is cooking."

The loft-house concept coincides with a land squeeze in popular markets, leading home builders to look for ways to make the most out of space. And as land prices rise, builders are also looking for novel construction techniques that bring down the total cost of a new home.

The New American Home 2004, for example, is made out of a sort of high-tech cinder block that snaps together like Legos. The roof is made of large plywood and Styrofoam panels that can be "popped down" onto the blocks with a crane, says Bert Jones, chief financial officer of Las Vegas's Merlin Contracting and Developing LLC, which built the prototype home.

The residential loft dates back to the 1960s when cash-strapped painters in Manhattan began moving into abandoned warehouses and industrial spaces. Loft living has since taken off in aging downtown and industrial areas nationwide and for decades its minimalist aesthetic has been in vogue with urban dwellers of all professions.

But when the association's National Council of Housing Industry weighed the notion of basing the New American Home on a loft, it wasn't convinced that everyday home buyers

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