

**B&D** DONETOWATCH

# The Homebuilder's Studio

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By Melinda Sheckells





It is said that working in tandem often produces faster and better results than individuals working alone. Based on this principle, the “studio concept” of doing business — bringing together complementary yet distinct services under one roof — is both a progressive and state-of-the-art approach to homebuilding consultation.

At the forefront of this collaborative concept, Studio Tippell, headed by Maximilian Development Principal Matthew Tippell and L.T. Designs, Color Design Studio Principal Leslie Tippell, provides a spectrum of knowledge spanning land acquisition, planning, marketing, project management and architectural color consulting.

“While our clients contract with us individually, we often work on the projects together as one or the other of us may be more familiar with the geographic region, architectural style and desires of a client based on past association with them,” Matthew says. “Since our businesses complement each other, it is often to our clients benefit for us to collaborate whenever possible.”

With an even split of work on projects in both urban and suburban environments, Sonoma, Calif.-based Studio Tippell works throughout California as well as in Hawaii.

Based on extensive industry experience, spanning over 20 years, the Tippells have solid relationships with builders, design professionals, vendors and subcontractors that in turn produce optimum results for their client base.



▲ **Leslie Tippell, principal, L.T. Designs, Color Studio and Matthew Tippell, principal, Maximilian Development.**

▼ **Mayfield Lane, Napa, Calif., is an in-fill subdivision located between Hwy 29 and the Silverado Trail. Acquisition & Planning/Design: Maximilian Development/Robert Hidey Architects. Color Consulting: L.T. Designs**

Gordon Tippell, a highly respected homebuilding industry legend, also provides his guidance as the Studio’s non-executive chairman. With over 35 years of experience, Gordon was responsible for setting up Taylor Woodrow Homes’ operations in California and went on to direct all of the company’s U.S. housing operations.

*Builder & Developer* recently spoke with Matthew and

Leslie Tippell on the direction of homebuilding during this pivotal time as it applies to their respective fields of color design and development.

#### **Through the eyes of a colorist**

**B&D:** How has the way builders and architects use color changed in the last five years?

**Leslie:** I feel most builders and architects are much more open to using color now than in the past and realize the importance of using color to market their communities. You do see

much more diversity in the streetscape than you used to. There is only one chance to make an impression on your buyers, and a poor color scheme can ruin the best architecture along with ur-



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◀ L.T. Designs created a palette of “Coffee and Cream” for this rustic Craftsman style house at the Christopherson Homes project “Grasslands” at Ragle Ranch located in Santa Rosa.

▼ “Oakwalk” for BayRock Residential is a contemporary mixed-use townhome/retail project located in downtown Emeryville.

ban planning, whereas a well-executed street scene is probably the best marketing tool a builder can implement.

**Builder and Developer:** In the world of color design, what do you think are the current major trends?

**Leslie Tippell:** For the last five years, I would say there has been a stronger trend toward a rustic Italianate color palette and the use of warmer golden tones.

For instance, you see the use of richer versions of yellow-gold, dark gold, warm browns, reddish browns, pumpkin, barn red, olive and sage green. I'd also say there has been a trend of using richer, deeper shades in general, a positive move that gets away from varying degrees of light beige.

Also there has been more use of different trim colors and secondary colors on housing other than white or off-white. Colorists have been playing around with a reddish-brown trim on a gold or olive green house or incorporating a third color such as sage green at the gable insets and garage doors.

**B&D:** What influences those trends from year to year?

**Leslie:** Everything! Color is very subjective but can also be a glimpse of today's society and where we are today. Fashion, the economy, global warming, ethnic colors, retro-

colors, spa colors and the new millennium all play a part. For exterior merchandising, I would say we're seeing more influence of ethnic or hot colors and cultural influences from Latin America and Asia. With the major influence of the Hispanic culture, we see the use of brighter, stronger colors such as bright yellow, orange, spice, rust and mocha. Deep red is also very popular in the Asian community.

#### From the development perspective

**B&D:** Who do you target your services to?

**Matthew Tippell:** The ideal client is a private investor or homebuilder who is seeking a development firm such as ours to take their project through the acquisition, product design and entitlement approval stage. Our clients may not have the expertise or in-house resources to deal with the ever-increasing complexity of the development process.

**B&D:** How do you see the master-planned community changing as land becomes more stressed?

**Matthew:** As the entitlement process through CEQA becomes more cumbersome, fewer developers will be willing or able to take on the large-scale master-planned communities. The financial risk involved in these projects is greater not only due to the uncertainty of the timing, but also the unknown final buildable lot count once the ultimate approval

comes through, if at all.

**B&D:** Have the types of projects you do changed based on the housing market downturn?

**Matthew:** The projects affected the most are small lot infill single-family and condominium sites. Making these projects financially viable is challenging. Buyers looking at this product type often purchase a conventional single-family resale home at a similar price point or are simply forced to rent. Therefore, in the short-term, we find ourselves pursuing less dense single-family projects.

**B&D:** What are some of the major challenges that the builders and developers you work with face?

**Matthew:** Understanding the net value of the product selling in the marketplace is the biggest challenge builders and developers face at the moment. This is difficult to calculate due to the various credits that are being given to the homebuyers at point of sale. Nobody wants to write a deal on a piece of land based on pricing from an existing comparable product only to find out that builder gave a \$90,000 option credit to the buyer. Additionally, problems in the lending industry and particularly the sub-prime loan issue will have a continued effect on the ability of buyers to qualify for homes on many projects.





# *Distinctive Living* THROUGHOUT THE BAY AREA

For over 30 years, SummerHill Homes has created a tradition of well-planned neighborhoods with dramatic architectural styling built in superior settings throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. SummerHill's communities are distinguished by their rich character and exceptional attention to detail, lending to the enduring quality of all its homes.

SummerHill's homes are located in the San Francisco Bay Area's most dramatic settings and they become a part of them. These distinctive locations, in turn, inspire everything from the sensitive orientation of the community to the smallest architectural detailing. SummerHill Homes has garnered some remarkable accolades from industry professionals and discerning homeowners alike. One look at the rich detail and character of a SummerHill Homes community and it is easy to see why each stands apart from any other.

## SAN JOSE

### 1 PIERCE RANCH

Executive-style homes. 4 to 5 bedrooms, 3.5 to 4.5 baths and approx. 3,454 to 4,127 square feet.

### 2 PARKWOOD

Two collections. Garden Collection – Flats and townhome-style condominiums. 2 to 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths and approx. 1,396 to 1,536 square feet. Redwood Collection – Single-family homes. 3 to 4 bedrooms, 2.5 to 3 baths and approx. 1,717 to 2,056 square feet.

### 3 VILLAGE SQUARE

Townhome-style condominiums and live/work units. 2 to 3 bedrooms, 2 to 3.5 baths and approx. 1,342 to 1,657 square feet.

## FREMONT

### 4 MORGAN SQUARE

Single-family homes and townhome-style condominiums. 3 to 4 bedrooms, 2.5 to 4.5 baths and approx. 1,310 to 2,036 square feet.

### 5 WOODBRIDGE

Flats and townhome-style condominiums. 2 to 3 bedrooms, 2 to 2.5 baths and approx. 1,392 to 1,500 square feet.

## UNION CITY

### 6 TALAVERA

Two collections. Traditions – Single-family homes. 3 to 6 bedrooms, 3 to 4 baths and approx. 2,214 to 3,367 square feet. Legacy – Single-family homes. 4 to 6 bedrooms, 3 to 5 baths and approx. 3,538 to 3,957 square feet.

## SAN BRUNO

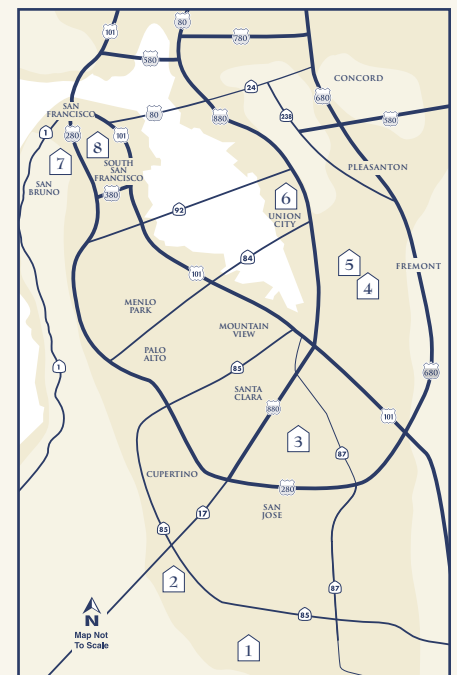
### 7 MERIMONT

Single-family homes. 3 to 4 bedrooms, 2.5 to 3 baths and approx. 2,092 to 2,300 square feet.

## SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

### 8 PARK STATION

Condominiums. 1 to 2 bedrooms, 1 to 2 baths and approx. 664 to 1,317 square feet.



Approximate square footage subject to change.

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