

Designing a Vacation Home

It's one thing to design a vacation home that appeals to renters and generates a positive cash flow for the owner. It's quite another to build a home that can survive its own success.

Imagine 480 house guests – year after year. They come and go at all hours of the day, tracking in sand, swimming, showering, cooking, eating, opening and closing doors and windows, partying, hot tubbing...vacationing in your home. It's just what you wished for – a full house 30 weeks a year. But is it what you planned for? Can your dream home survive all this success?

At Beach Realty & Construction/Kitty Hawk Rentals, we are active participants in the changing Outer Banks marketplace where once simple rental “cottages” are giving way to “palatial estates” which cater to the vacationers’ every wish. Our decades of successful experience of coordinating services in design & construction, rental management, and real estate sales have provided us with a mother lode of information on how to build and furnish a home that can withstand the wear and tear of this phenomenal increase in rentals.

Here, then, is a brief alphabetical checklist of things we recommend to ensure that our homeowners will enjoy a high return with a minimum of repairs and replacements.

Air conditioning

Vacationers want the weather hot and sunny and the home cool and refreshing. We can't guarantee the weather but we do all we can to keep air conditioning service calls to a minimum. When it is 95 outside and the house is hot, Kitty Hawk Rentals wants to be assured that the vacationers will be cooled off as soon as possible. We only recommend subcontractors with a proven record of quick and reliable service, most especially during periods of high demand.

Appliances

We select manufacturers based on product reliability, past performance, and consumer interest. High on our list are companies with a good record of prompt, courteous repair service. People paying large weekly fees are notoriously (and understandably) impatient when faced with breakdowns. While the homeowner determines the price range, we always stress the importance of individual features that are simple to understand and use.

Cabinets and counters

Styles and choices abound to meet every price range in cabinet selection. With kitchens open to the living area in most cases, the wide range of color and texture choices in countertop laminate makes it possible for the homeowner to color coordinate the total decor of the great room. Offering that “touch of class,” granite is frequently selected both for its durability and its classic appeal. Cultured marble vanity tops in the bathroom offer the easiest cleanup.

Ceramic tile

Tile can provide a striking accent in almost any room in your home. When properly installed, it is one of the most durable counter or floor surfaces available. Watch out, though. When something is dropped on a tile surface, it is almost certain to break. This can be especially hazardous in the kitchen – broken glass and bare feet are not a good match. Tile in the bathroom also presents special cleaning challenges. A freshly cleaned bathroom doesn't look clean to a vacationer if the grout isn't as sparkling as the tile. We recommend that you restrict your use of tile to key areas for strong design impact and low maintenance.

Flooring

Choose carpeting that will wear well and have it professionally cleaned on a regular basis. We look for fibers that are inherently stain resistant and weaves that will hold up best to wear and tear. For example, a tightly woven carpet with variegated color and texture is easy to clean, less likely to trap sand, and less likely to matt down in highly trafficked areas than a plush off white pile. It may not be as dramatic but it will look better for longer. Go for the extra expense of quality under padding. This will add to the comfort and longevity of whatever carpeting you select. You can assume a carpet life expectancy in the rental market of five to seven years. Go ahead and plan for this replacement expense now. Nothing puts off renters and buyers more than a worn and discolored carpet.

Wood floors are popular and add a touch of elegance to a stylish home. However, wood surfaces are particularly susceptible to scratching and marring from sand. And sand is everywhere. A worn wood surface is not elegant, so take special care to pad furniture legs and count on extra maintenance. You may also wish to consider a number of new wood-like products which are extremely realistic and durable.

Furnishings

Tread that fine line between design and durability. Crate furniture may last forever but renters are sick of it. In our experience, some vacationers even ask us about furniture when they make the reservation so they can avoid a home with crate furniture. On the other hand, rattan and wicker lend a very popular “beachy” look but can succumb prematurely to renter wear and tear. We take special care to refer our building customers to someone who is familiar with vacation lifestyles and product durability. We carefully limit our referrals to decorators and furniture suppliers who are knowledgeable about fabrics, finishes, and structural integrity.

And don't neglect the personal touches. These are homes, not hotels, and the vacationers look forward to comfortable and relaxing environments. The more thought you give to the little things, the more respect and appreciation you will elicit for your home. Extra touches are most likely to guarantee repeat reservations.

Lighting

In the design and planning stages, we pay special attention to the layout so that people who are unfamiliar with the home can use logic to find switches. We make sure the stairs and hallways are safely lighted. We advise our customers to select interior fixtures and fans for style, ease of maintenance and cleaning, and simplicity of operation. We recommend exterior fixtures that will withstand our special weather elements and provide plenty of light.

Pools and spas

These features are in high demand and can add dramatically to your rental income. However, there are so many people selling these items that it can be especially treacherous for building clients. We have learned from experience that it simply does not pay to cut corners. The best will pay for themselves over the long run. We have consistently used the same suppliers over the years. We select them for the quality of the product, installation, their ability to respond quickly to maintenance requests, and their willingness to back up their product. When it comes to swimming pools, you most definitely get what you pay for.

Plan for success, budget for maintenance, and your rental investment will pay off year after year.

Courtesy of Beach Realty & Construction