

REAL ESTATE

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Property



FOR MATA AFFIDELTY IMAGES
'RATE' DIVA: Eva Longoria buys in the hills.

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By RYON
 Writer
 Longoria, who costars in the ABC show "Desperate Housewives," has purchased a \$1.7 million home in the hills. Longoria, the youngest wife in the ensemble cast, lives in a three-bedroom, three-bath Mediterranean built in the 1920s. The 2,000-square-foot home has a grand entry, a fireplace, a kitchen and a large living room with hardwood floors.

The new show, which ranked No. 1 in the country among network dramas, stars Longoria, 29, plays glamorous housewife Gabrielle Solis. Longoria is married to actor Carlos, who plays her young husband, a situation that has become messy. In April, Longoria is expected to shoot a feature film with Michael Douglas. Before "Desperate Housewives," she starred on the daytime drama "Young and the Restless," the comedy-variety show "Hot Chick Live" and the USA series "L.A. Dragnet." Longoria also plays Gabrielle Solis in "Desperate Housewives" and Teri Hatcher in the Fox series "Desperate Housewives." Longoria won a Golden Globe Award in January.

David Stratton and Amber Le Bon of Hollywood Hills Realty Co. had the listing, and Julie Jones of Keller Williams, Sunset Strip, represented Longoria, real estate sources say.

and a ball, now...
 esi Jr.'s selling

Desi Arnaz Jr., son of actress Lucille Ball and bandleader, actor and producer Desi Arnaz, sold his Beverly Hills home for \$1.7 million. The house, which Ball had had her son find, has four bedrooms and a pool.



Photographs by STEFANO PALTERA FOR THE TIMES
SPACE INVADER: One-year-old Ruby plays in her stepbrother's room while Doc tries to focus on his homework in the Gentzlers' five-bedroom home.

Growth spurt in big homes

More buyers are two families who have become one. Many want to provide personal space for each child.

By CHUCK GREEN
 Special to The Times

WHEN it came to buying a house, size meant nearly everything to Dave and Jessica Gentzler. With five bedrooms and 3,800 square feet, the Manhattan Beach home they wanted would accommodate Dave Gentzler's three children from a previous marriage, who live with them half the time, and a child the Gentzlers had together.

For many blended families, finding a home large enough means they sometimes must sacrifice style, condition or location to have a bedroom for every child. But even if providing individual bedrooms is not financially feasible, experts say families should still strive to find ways to create a sense of privacy and belonging for each child.

Blended families are a growing segment of the population that is helping to fuel interest in larger homes, according to the National Assn. of Home Builders. The StepFamily Foundation, based in New York City, estimates that in 50% of U.S. families, one or both members of the couple have children from a previous relationship.

"It seems like almost everyone is blended now," said builder-developer Dennis Cleland, owner of D.C. Construction & Development in Los Angeles, which builds townhouses and single-family homes. Of course, the preference for a larger home can be based on status and prestige, he added, but about 60% of his business consists of blended families.

For many, like the Gentzlers, space needs narrow the search for a home.

"It was listed for about \$989,000," Jessica Gentzler said of the home they bought, "but we really liked how big it was."

So, to head off an upcoming open house, the Gentzlers heeded their real estate agent's advice and bid high. "He thought if we made an offer that was good enough," she said, "maybe they'd just take it."

That's exactly what happened. "Beating the open house was critical," said their agent, Gary Richardson of Shorewood Realtors in Hermosa Beach. The Gentzlers, who are both sales reps and who had house-shopped for about a month, paid \$1,050,000 for the home, which they moved into in September.

"We had rented a house with two bedrooms upstairs [one occupied by his daughter] and one downstairs, which the boys used," said Jessica Gentzler. But then baby Ruby, now 1, entered the picture. "We looked at a few [See Blended, Page K12]



UNDER ONE ROOF: The blended Gentzler family, from top, Dave and Ruby, Jessica, Gudge, Carol and Doc, in their Manhattan Beach home, which has a bedroom for each child.



STEFANO PALTERA FOR THE TIMES

ALL TOGETHER: "We wanted to make sure our kids were comfortable," Roy Schermerhorn said of buying his family's four-bedroom home in Palos Verdes Estates. From left, Evan Schermerhorn, Karen Jensen, Roy, Simon Schermerhorn, Jillian Jensen and Brian Jensen.

Larger families, bigger homes

[Blended, from Page K1]

places with three bedrooms but wanted four. His oldest son is 14, and when you're 14, you don't really want to share a bedroom with your 9-year-old brother. Maybe if they were closer in age, it wouldn't be as bad to share a room, but we thought it was important to find a house that was big enough for everyone."

Indeed, separate bedrooms are ideal, especially for step-siblings, said Aileen Braun, director of the StepFamily School in Garden Grove, who works with families as a coach and is certified through the StepFamily Foundation.

"If possible, people want to keep their own bedrooms and own space. Putting kids in the same room is not as easy as people think. A lot of times, I think there's a perception that if you have a couple of girls and they're 8 or 9, it would be great to have them share a room. Not necessarily."

If separate bedrooms aren't feasible, Braun said, "define clear, separate spaces: which side of the closet belongs to which child, and give each their own dresser, or at least a couple of drawers. You want them to each have their own private space, especially if we're talking step-siblings."

In fact, Cleland doesn't like to build a home with fewer than three bedrooms. "No matter how small the third bedroom is, even if it's only 10 feet by 11 feet, bedroom count is the main thing."

Even before the growth in blended families, builders were starting to build bigger houses to meet buyers' demand for more room, according to statistics compiled by the NAHB Economics Group.

Of single-family homes built in 2003, 37% included four bedrooms or more, up from 23% in 1973. In the western United States, 45% had four or more bedrooms in 2003, compared with 29% in 1973.

"Of course, people want the space for their friends, relatives or visitors," said Gopal Ahluwalia, NAHB staff vice president for research. "In the case of blended families, more bedrooms also can be a consideration."

Tips for better blending

Housing blended families under one roof can be a challenge logistically, financially and emotionally, said Aileen Braun, director of the StepFamily School in Garden Grove, the West Coast affiliate of the StepFamily Foundation. She offered the following guidelines to help in choosing a new home:

■ **Stay in the same community.** A child's home environment is changing significantly, so the more you can do to maintain the community environment, the better the transition will be for all members of the blended family.

■ **Have a space for every child.** If individual rooms are not possible, have big enough bedrooms so that each child has his or her own bed and private storage space. Children should not sleep on the sofa bed and live out of suitcases when they visit. It's heartbreaking for children to know their presence in the home vanishes as soon as they leave and the sofa bed is folded back up.

■ **If possible, have an area where the children can play freely.** Choose a home with space for

them to make noise that cannot be heard throughout the rest of the house. This encourages the children to have friends over, without encroaching on the space of the adults.

■ **Make room for the stepparent.** Where can stepparents go to get out of the fray? An office or workshop that is off limits to the children is recommended. A common complaint of stepparents with no biological children is that they feel that they "do not belong" in their own home.

■ **The master bedroom should be a sanctuary.** This is the only place the couple gets to be just a couple. This room should be spacious and out of earshot of where the children and their friends play.

— CHUCK GREEN

That certainly was the case for Roy Schermerhorn and his wife, Karen Jensen, who had their four children very much in mind when they purchased a four-bedroom, 2,700-square-foot home in Palos Verdes Estates in June. They wouldn't even look at a home with fewer than three bedrooms and would have purchased a five-bedroom if they had found one.

"We wanted to have it set up so [the children] basically had space they were comfortable in because they would be truly living here, even though it was half time," said Schermerhorn, 53, who has two sons, ages 9 and 13.

"And we wanted her son to particularly be comfortable because we hoped he would spend more time with us," he said of his wife's 12-year-old son. And while they weren't sure how often her 16-year-old daughter would be with them, he said, they wanted her to have her own room.

The 12- and 13-year-old boys share a bedroom, however. "They knew each other before Karen and I met, and it's an unusually big bedroom."

Like the Gentzlers, Schermerhorn and Jensen, who paid \$1.2 million for their home, searched for about a month.

"One reason we bought so quickly was the boys really liked it," said Schermerhorn, who works in administration/management in the aerospace industry. "It's got a big living room and family room combination. It's almost like a gymnasium."

For both families, being blended also meant the parents had to make some compromises in their housing choices.

"If we only had the kids every other weekend, I'm sure it would have been different," said Jessica Gentzler, 32. "Every other weekend, I would have said [the boys] could share a bedroom and we would have moved into a three-

bedroom house. But when it's half their life and they're here during the week, for my husband, it was really important for them to have their own space."

The Gentzlers also might have opted for a home that required less work.

"I think we would have rather moved into a house that was perfect," she said. "This house and the interior are a little older; not everything was brand new and the perfect style we like, but there is so much space."

Likewise, Schermerhorn said he and Jensen, a 43-year-old accountant, probably bought a larger home than they had originally envisioned. "Even though they wouldn't be with us full time, we wanted to make sure our kids were comfortable and would want to spend time with us," he said.

Besides a generous number of bedrooms, builder Cleland said he also designs homes with bathrooms that provide extra privacy. "In some of our homes, we'll put the sink outside the toilet and shower area, so each bedroom has its own sink."

Despite the large number of blended families among his customers, Cleland does not believe builders are solely catering to this market but are responding also to the demand for larger homes driven by a desire for privacy. "It's just the fact we're conscious of" that segment, he said, "and know we need to have X amount of bedrooms to satisfy our clientele."

For Schermerhorn, pulling together a blended family has been challenging even with adequate bedroom space.

"The issues of creating a step-family are so far beyond what we ever dreamed they would be that it's hard to even describe," he said of his blended family of six. "It's rather staggering what it takes to pull that many people together and have them go on vacations, live together, accept each other as someone who's going to be around a lot. We can't pretend to say we were really prepared for all that."

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