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Row homes finding new popularity in Mississippi

Places like Lost Rabbit, Fondren and Township at Colony Park are examples of old concept finding new footing

Dating back to colonial Philadelphia and Boston, the row home is a hallmark of traditional city living in the U.S. And, now in places such as Lost Rabbit at the Ross Barnett Reservoir, Fondren in Jackson and Township at Colony Park in Ridgeland, the row home is finding a new popularity.

Row homes are also sometimes referred to as townhouses. But, generally row houses would be thinner in their description, said Robert Zander, Jones-Zander Ltd., Grenada, immediate past president of the American Institute of Architecture in Mississippi.

Zander said there is a trend toward row homes in larger population areas.

"The places where there is more growth is where you will see this," Zander said. "There is potential for some energy savings because of walls shared between the houses. But, land acquisition costs are the biggest reason for the popularity. You don't have to buy as much land for the number of units, or get as much land rezoned for the use you need."

The concept is popular with people who are retiring or others who don't want as much yard space. Zander said living in a row home is a step before getting into a condo situation with no responsibility as regards to yard maintenance.



Barranco

Row homes are not a new concept, and that is one of the best things about them, said Michael A. Barranco, principal, Barranco Architecture and Interior Design.

"It is one of the older forms of housing," Barranco said. "It is very instrumental in promotion of community and promotion of streetscape. The

promotion of community is pretty obvious. You quickly get a density of population in an area close to the street. One of the neat things about the row homes is they create really great streetscapes."

With a row home, people are connected not just by the homes, but by the sidewalks and exterior landscaping. Neighbors can chat while walk-

ing the dog or tending the flowers in the front yard. Ideally, the home is within walking distance of work and amenities such as shops, restaurants and schools. That sort of walkable, mixed-use neighborhood is a key feature of the New Urbanism neighborhood design movement

An example of a New Urban community in Mississippi is Lost Rabbit, which has row homes under construction near the marina area. Some row homes, known as "live-work units," are located at the marina. The live-work row homes have a downstairs area that can be used as an office or shop. The living quarters are upstairs. People can either use the downstairs for their own business, or lease it out.

Barranco has also designed some live-work units in the historic Fondren community in Jackson where he lives. These are three-story homes that feature a rooftop terrace that includes an outdoor fireplace. A major amenity is the high-rise view of Fondren. People have privacy, but can also feel connected to the community around them.

The model is designed so the ground floor could be used as a personal business or as a "mother-in-law suite." The ground level includes a two-car garage, a bathroom and rooms that can be used for offices or a bedroom and living room. There is a living room and kitchen on the second floor and two suites on the third floor. An elevator connects all three.

"If I lived in this home, my mother or father could live on the first floor, me on the third floor, and we could all use the kitchen level in the middle," Barranco said. "The building is 46 x 22 feet, so it takes up a small footprint. When you design modern day townhouses, you try to think of amenities people desire and how you can manipulate those desires into a form that is more urban. So, we give them a two-car garage and the ability to have a bathroom and bedroom on the ground floor. We provide an elevator so it is easily accessible, and then these great outdoor spaces on the roof."

The shared walls between houses have characteristics providing a fire and smoke barrier. In

accommodating that, one automatically satisfies some acoustical needs. One clearly wants to take acoustics in mind, and separate the two homes adequately. That can be done with added layers of gypsum board and acoustical insulation. But more importantly, there is a clear separation of walls so sound does not transfer.

"You want to make sure you select durable materials, and materials that will accommodate the fire resistance and separation required," Barranco said. "For exteriors, we find that brick is really good. We do either exposed or painted brick. We are designing some out of stucco, as well."

One of the things he likes to do is design homes to create a connection with the outdoors. For example, he utilizes Juliet-type balconies that are tight up against the building, step out terraces or roof top terraces. These are not only an amenity for the owner or renter, but also add to the architectural character, as well.

With the Fondren row homes, the inside units are entered from the front and the end units are entered through a courtyard. Those have very New Orleans-type flair with attractive landscaping and a water fountain coming down the wall.

Barranco said the critical thing, especially for New Urban communities, is to understand the importance of layers.

"The problem with the way we have built in the recent past is buildings have to do all the heavy lifting," he said. "There is no relationship from the curb to the sidewalk and from the sidewalk to the front porch. It is very disjointed. Whereas, with a community that respects layers — the street, sidewalk, a strip of grass and then the building — the building can be modest in its design and yet still be beautiful."

A New Urbanist community in Ridgeland called the Township and Colony Park, a Kerioth Corp. greenfield development on Highway Colony Parkway, contains both row homes and flats. If there are homes with one unit designed above another, those are referred to as flats. The Township flats will be a mixture of rental units and fee simple condos.