

# New Homes

Midwest's Leading  
Real Estate Marketplace



## The House Hunter

Despite some garage-forward houses, Prairie Crossing proves inviting to lovers of conservation and handsome homes, says **Genevieve Buck**

# Serene and clean

**P**rairie Crossing in north suburban Grayslake has such a glowing reputation as one of the country's pioneer conservation communities that a first visit can be somewhat daunting.

But this 677-acre development, with only 20 percent of its total acreage devoted to homes, certainly lives up to its kudos and it exceeded my own expectations.

It has wide open spaces, lots of natural greenery—including native grasses, marshes and farmland—as well as a 22-acre lake with a nice little sand beach. Of the 362 homes planned 195 have been sold and buildout is projected for 2004.

All the homes are traditional, inspired by early Midwest homesteads and designed by four architects, including Margaret McCurry. The 15 plans are varied, coming in different colored vinyl or cedar siding. Some are ranches, others two-story or two-plus-attic homes on curved streets and cul-de-sacs, grouped somewhat closely together in order to have more open community space.

Prairie Crossing looks serene, clean and, most of all, inviting. Just seeing all those big porches, so many with wood or wicker rockers, made this house hunter want to go

and sit awhile and just ponder the good things in life.

However, from a very personal standpoint, Prairie Crossing is not perfect. It has at least two drawbacks: Several of the homes have two-car garages that extend beyond the front of the homes; also, it's impossible to see Lake Michigan from the grounds. (My remedy: As I passed the garage-front homes, I looked the other way. My consolation: I know that even a glimpse of the Lake from a setting like this would add several million to the cost of these homes.)

Though the Prairie Crossing homes are said to cost more than those in nearby communities, the base prices surprised me. They're \$269,900 to \$427,900, with 1,590 to 3,428 square feet and two-car garages. The homes, not too incidentally, are billed as



Photos for the Tribune by Steve Lasker

The Foursquare model at Prairie Crossing. The 2,599-square-foot home is base-priced at \$339,900, though the model adds 400 square feet by finishing and carpeting the third floor, bringing the price to \$500,000.



Photo for the Tribune by Steve Lasker

The 10-foot-long butler's pantry in the Foursquare model at Prairie Crossing has granite countertops and an abundance of cabinets.

energy-efficient and "healthy" (as in, designed to accommodate asthma- or allergy-prone individuals), and they have high-tech wiring.

Think of the amenities: There's a beautifully restored 1885 barn that's a community center (gracious enough to be used for wedding receptions) with fitness center and full kitchen; a community stable for all your horses; and an organic garden plus farm that yield enough produce and flowers for weekly on-site summer markets.

Am I taken with this place? Well, yes. But, when a building, site or model strongly appeals to my taste and my own interests, I look at everything with an especially critical eye, as I have with some quite sleekly designed residences and as I did when I reviewed a newer, more rustic, environmentally sensitive development, Tryon Farm, near Michigan City, Ind.

For people interested in the environment, in handsomely finished homes with three to five bedrooms and multiple baths, Prairie Crossing is a very special place.

And, it's easy to arrive at that conclusion even before studying every room, every corner and closet of a wonderfully old-fashioned, tastefully decorated model, the Foursquare.

Open the front door and look straight ahead from foyer to hall (with guest closet, powder room, stairway) and see the breakfast area of a very comfortable family room and, beyond, the French doors to a large back deck.

For a little more formality, to the left and right of the front entry are living and dining rooms.

That family room, dining space and open kitchen area has enough windows to provide plenty of natural light, even on a rain-sodden day. There's an island in front of the contemporary kitchen, which is a host/cook's delight but plays second fiddle to the adjacent 10-foot-long butler's pantry, which has enough cabinets, drawers and counter space to placate even the most acquisitive collector.

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A laundry/mud room links the house to the garage. Midway to the second floor, there's a landing and a soothing view that calls for a window seat. The master suite has twin walk-in closets, enclosed toilet and impressive bath.

There are three more bedrooms and a sectioned bath. The 2,599-square-foot home is base-priced at \$339,900 with full landscaping, dishwasher, range, disposal and TechStart 400 structured wiring among its standard amenities.

With an additional 400 square feet acquired through finishing and carpeting the third floor, the model is \$500,000, but that includes upgraded kitchen/pantry cherry cabinets, stainless steel appliances and granite counters; washer/dryer, solid core doors, central air, Tech-Lan 800 wiring and whole house audio; cedar siding, deck, additional landscaping and drywalled and painted garage.

The clincher: The garage faces an alley.

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