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## ARCHITECTURE COACH COLUMN

*Living like royalty*

### **Fortress in the Suburbs**

Castle-like homes are popular with new-home buyers. But the style has dark roots in history.

**BY DUO DICKINSON**



"A man's home is his castle," the expression goes. And for many of today's buyers, the ideal home really does resemble a castle — stonework, rounded turrets, and even gated entries. The style is especially popular with buyers of new homes.

"There is a new style of construction down here that I love," writes Dorit Golan Cullen, a reader from Keller Williams Realty in Houston, who listed a new castle-style home in the spring. "It reminds me of the castles I visited in Ireland last fall. I would like to know the true origin and style."

The castle look, reminiscent of fairy tales, radiates luxury and wealth. However, when you get to the historical root of the architectural features, there's an aura of darkness and mystery.

#### **A Military Mission**

That's because castles throughout history were built to serve an important military function in addition to housing royalty. Unlike today's castle-style homes that are designed to be inviting and blend in with the neighborhood, real castles were meant to keep inhabitants secure and scare away enemies by their sheer size.

Soaring towers gave those who lived inside a good view of oncoming armies and a prime position to fight back. Thick walls insulated the castle from the ammunition of the day, and windows were small to limit exposure to enemy forces. The surrounding landscape, which often included rivers and hills, also served a strategic military purpose.

Today, however, Americans tend to hold on to a romantic view of castles. Perhaps that's because of princess fairy tales and the image of the [Cinderella Castle](#) at Walt Disney World. All style and virtually no defensibility, its whimsy and charm are infectious.

The Disney castle is said to be inspired by the elaborate [Neuschwanstein Castle](#) that Bavaria's "Crazy" Prince Ludwig II built in the 19th century. Ludwig had a reputation for living in a fantasy world and creating overly elaborate structures.

#### **Embracing the Romantic Side**

Despite the dark history of castles, it's easy to see why buyers would find a castle-like home appealing. Though the rounded turrets, heavy wood doors, stone walls, and gated entries aren't necessary in a military sense, these features can make the home's occupants feel more secure (and perhaps, more royal).

Of course, castles don't come cheap. The building materials needed to achieve the castle style are inherently expensive in today's residential construction world of stick building. The complex roof forms necessary to create expressed walls, towers, and custom windowscapes are very pricey indeed.

But many new materials — cast stone, faux stucco, and simulated slate roofing — can help to cut costs while still conjuring up a castle appearance.

There are also options for buyers who want the castle appearance, but aren't willing to pay top dollar for a brand new home. By applying some of the architectural elements and materials described above, they can transform an existing house into something that gives that extra touch of history, adventure, and yes, security.

As with any modern interpretation of a traditional style, the risk of creating a castle home is in becoming a theme-park attraction. But if buyers can create a realistic vision of a home that mixes historical architecture and modern-day practicality, it's possible to build a home that's comfortable and grand.



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