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*Pottery Barn at Shades of Green*  
*photo by John Scott Glass*

# at Home in FRISCO

by natalie medigovich

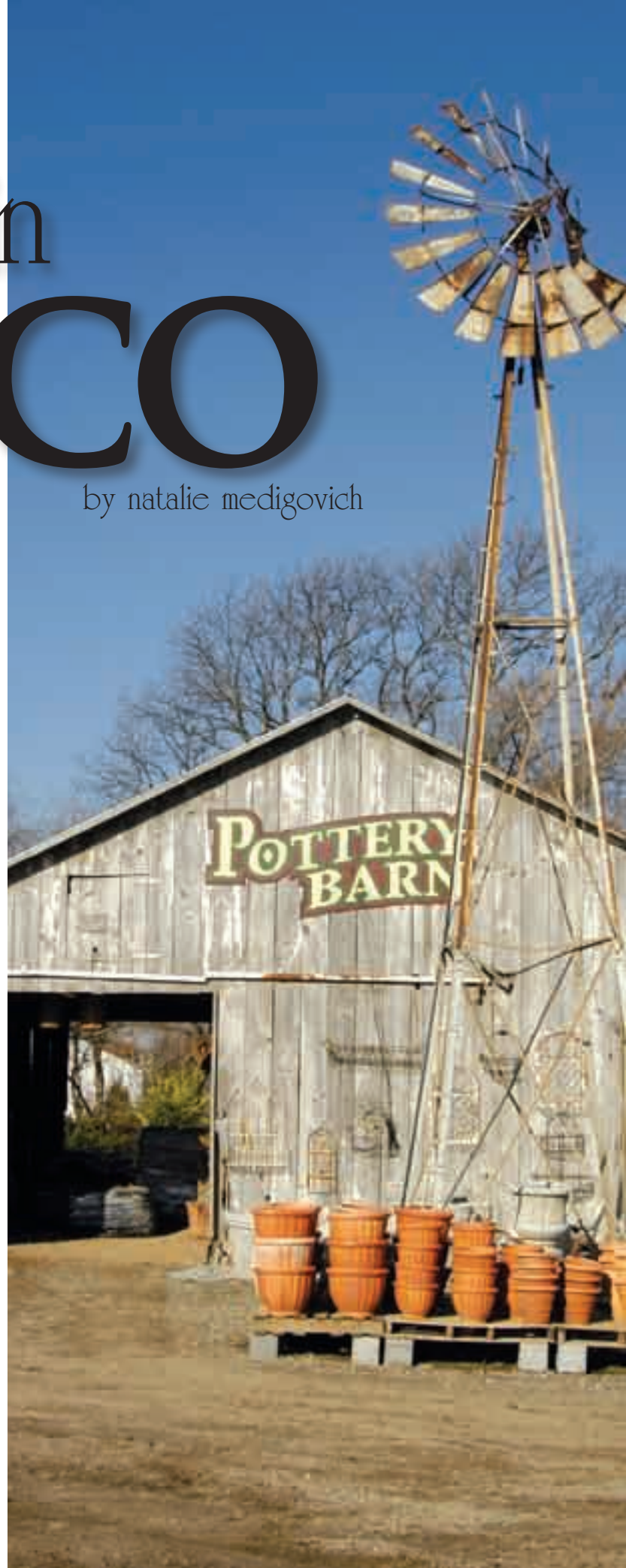
IT'S BEEN ABOUT A CENTURY SINCE THE SAINT LOUIS/SAN FRANCISCO RAILROAD (later shortened to the "Frisco") crossed FM 720 bringing a few hundred colonists from primarily Tennessee and Kentucky to seek their fortunes farming the rich, rolling prairies of Frisco, Texas. Even local residents taking part in the most recent boom in population must realize Frisco's agricultural history when confronted with the ghost-like huge white grain elevators that now lie dormant near the north intersection of the railroad tracks and Main Street.

"I've had a little more than 200 acres in Frisco since 1964," said retired commercial real estate broker Ralph Belknap, who lives in Dallas. "A partner farms it for me. I think there's still quite a few farms left in Frisco. I know there's a lot of undeveloped land. I don't plan on selling mine (land) any time soon."

Indeed, farming was taught in schools, discussed in barbershops and referred to in preachers' sermons for eight decades in Frisco. Today's schools, street signs and business parks preserve some of the more well-known farmers' names, like Smith, Wade, Newman, Elliott, Cobb, and Rasor. In 1998 the last two families to farm their own land, the Newmans and the Cobbs, sold their land to developers.

The old Standerfer farm, located at 8801 Coit Road and now part of the Shades of Green nursery/landscape business property, was originally used for growing cotton and grain crops. The oldest surviving barn in Frisco is located there, now called the Pottery Barn for what it stores, as are the oldest and largest trees in Frisco.

"We were leasing our old property at Preston and Lebanon before we bought this (seven) acres," said Shades of Green co-owner and 10-year Frisco resident Robert Wier. "The daughter who inherited this land wanted to grant her mother's request that no one live in the house or on the property again. The mother also loved gardening so it was a perfect fit to have our business here."



*Historic features at Shades of Green, one of Frisco's oldest trees and indoor well. photo by John Scott Glass*

Wier said he removed rotting buildings such as a pig barn and an old outhouse as well as “many years of acquired junk” to clean up the area and make the land more useful and up to date. And though the house burned down in 1979, the original hand-dug well still has water in it and is located oddly enough in the center of the rebuilt stucco house. An old storm cellar still exists as well.

“There’s been many a time that we thought we’d have to run for cover during some storms to that old cellar,” Wier laughed, referring to the scarcity of underground shelter in the south.

But one of the most famous Frisco farms, the 900-acre Box Ranch now owned by Baxter Brinkman, does have the elusive basement, a little known fact familiar only to historians. The security and alarm system magnate also purchased additional land surrounding the northeast corner of Preston Road and FM 720, making him not only the proud owner of the 14,000 square-foot Colonial style house used for the pilot episode of the television show Dallas, but also the largest single land owner in Frisco.



Historic downtown Frisco, roughly located north of Main Street between Second and Seventh Streets and bordered by Ash Street, formed an original neighborhood called “Old Donation” where many residents enjoyed five-acre lots. In February of 1902, Dr. I.S. Rogers paid \$115 for a lot to build one of Frisco’s first houses.

Slowly, like many other places around the world that have newfound notoriety and prestige, farming became less and less of a commodity and lot size shrank to accommodate more people. Fifteen new subdivisions are planned and 5,660 lots platted for single-family home construction in Frisco today.

### MAKING HOMES OF THE 1960’S LIVABLE TODAY

Many of the homes of Frisco’s original population boom need updating, either to increase market value to sell their property or to increase the enjoyment and livability of their domicile.

“Some of the more expensive things owners needed to upgrade is converting to central heat and air,” said realtor Charlotte Tittle of Collin County Realty, Inc. “That can cost thousands of dollars. They usually need to upgrade major appliances and get their

electric up to code as well. Some of the old cast iron plumbing needs to be replaced with the newer PVC pipes too. It’s hard to tell from the outside which of the homes have been updated on the inside though.”

Tittle said adding amenities such as an additional bathroom and expanding closets, as well as installing the more energy-efficient double-paned windows are other upgrades that people who are willing to spend the money should consider. Of course, some upgrades and updating can be cost-prohibitive, and do not necessarily guarantee the fixer-upper getting his investment dollars back come sale time.

A recent survey by the National Association of Realtors showed that remodeling the kitchen or bathroom was one of the best home investments. Kitchen remodeling recouped an average of 88% invested, while bathroom remodeling recouped about 82% of amount spent. And though expensive, adding a room or garage to a home can recoup about 84% on investment when the home is sold. It was also noted that prospective homebuyers usually look, on average, at 18 homes before selecting one.



Home and Garden Television’s popular website noted that kitchens decorated more than 10 years ago feel outdated, especially if décor choices were trendy. Current kitchen design trends run in a five to seven-year cycle as opposed to the slower pace 15 to 20 years ago. A more commercial grade look as well as improved functionality is popular in today’s kitchen updates, ranging from upgrading counter tops from laminate to stone, adding glass panels and interior lighting to cabinets and changing the backsplash.

Anne Wickes of Keller Williams Realty said that simple inexpensive cosmetic upgrades and updating could greatly enhance most sellers’ chances of making a good sale.

“Painting walls neutral colors throughout gives a more spacious feeling and can add \$500 to \$600 to your market value,” Wickes said. “There are so many great things you can do for

yourself now and it's fun to do, from landscaping to updating lighting fixtures to adding a little porch or deck. You don't need to do all of these at one time either."

Heath Carver, store manager of Lowes in Frisco, has been with the company for 15 years and said there is a definite increase in the number of do-it-yourselfers.

"Typically when people buy a house they don't get all the upgrades offered from builders and upgrade on their own," Carver said. "I remember when they built my house, there was a 65% mark-up on upgrades. A lot of people today are watching TV programs like Trading Spaces and come in and tell me they want to do what they saw on the show."

Location, one of Frisco's biggest selling points, can also add thousands of dollars to market value. For example, a corner lot can add a couple thousand dollars to a home's value as can being located on a golf course. The newest residents want it all.

The National Association of Home Builders compiled a list of the top 10 most essential features of new homes from recent buyers' surveys. They are: home office space or a spare room with flexible space, a separate dining room, exterior lighting, a treed lot, fenced yard, front porch, rear deck, double-paned windows, separate laundry room, and an exhaust fan.

### A GREEN HOME

Three of these desirables, the treed lot, double-paned windows and an exterior exhaust fan are part of Frisco's Green Building Program established in May 2001. Frisco is the first city in the United States to adopt a mandatory residential Green Building Program, which uses the Environmental Protection Agency's "Energy Star" program requirements as the minimum building standard for new homes. Any home final platted after May 23, 2001 is a "green" home.

According to the city's website, a building has tremendous impact on the environment both during construction and through its operation. By reducing energy and water consumption, and protecting the surrounding ecosystems and occupants' health by wise land use, building design, and construction strategies, a green building is born.

Frisco's comprehensive Environmental Administrator Jeff Witt attended a workshop at the University of North Texas a few years ago when he further developed the idea of one of the presenters.

"He was talking about building one green building and I thought to myself, 'why not create a whole green city?'" Witt, an environmental consultant for the military for four years, remembered. "The city council embraced the idea. With the Green Building Program, you get the best house you can get."



*New kitchen at Frisco Square*

*photo by John Scott Glass*

Witt quickly established himself as a conservationist and not an environmentalist (he does not object to anyone's right to make a profit), pointing out that the reason for the need for such a program is the Metroplex's – and therefore surrounding region's – continued non-compliance with the EPA's air quality standard requirements.

"I drive a full-size truck, hunt and am sort of a redneck," Witt laughed. "But I look at my two kids and want to leave the world a better place for them. Most people don't know that 30% of air pollution comes from homes, not just SUVs."

The purpose of the Green Building program is to foster a cooperative approach between the City and homebuilders by addressing energy efficiency, water conservation, indoor air quality, and waste recycling measures. Installing "Energy Star" rated appliances is just one part of the process. All green homes also must score an 86 or above on the Home Energy Rating System (HERS).

A HERS rating is an objective, standardized evaluation of the energy efficiency of a home, compared to a simulated reference house (i.e., same size and shape as the rated home) that meets minimum energy code requirements. The HERS rating results in a score between 0 and 100. The reference house is assigned a score of 80. For every 5% reduction in energy use (compared to the reference house) the score increased by one point. Thus, an Energy Star labeled home has a minimum HERS rating of 86, and is 30% more energy efficient than the reference house.

"We get calls from other cities and municipalities inquiring about it (the Green Building Program) all the time," said Frisco's environmental planning technologist Jody Purvis. "They all want to know how and why it works, and what works about it and how

**"Fifteen new subdivisions and 5,660 lots platted for single-family homes in Frisco today."**

are we brave enough to make it mandatory.”

Purvis said green buildings will last longer and be better quality, making people who buy homes in Frisco stay in Frisco.

“If you look south of us you can see other cities where the technology industry died and they are ghost towns now almost,” Purvis explained. “We don’t want that to happen here. Since inception of the program 1,174 new homes are green. Once people do it (create and live in green homes) they see it’s not hard and a better way to go.”

Purvis added that older homes can be retrofitted to the Energy Star’s standards by doing things like replacing windows; sealing ducts, replace landscaping with native plants, and using compact fluorescent light bulbs in place of existing energy-wasting ones. Homeowners wanting to voluntarily meet these now mandated requirements can learn how to do it themselves on Energy Star’s website. The costs for such upgrades average from \$1,500 to \$3,000.



Before – Fireplace of Lisa & Jason Smit  
photo by John Scott Glass

### NEW HOME TRENDS

Many of the newer residents who either build or remodel existing dream homes spare no expense when it comes to their needs and wants.

Most of Frisco’s biggest homes are located in either the Starwood subdivision, located northwest of Dallas Parkway and Lebanon Road or the new Chapel Creek subdivision, east of Frisco High School on Parkwood Boulevard.

“Men want a media room and a three or four-car garage,” said David Turk, director of sales and marketing for Stephenson Custom Builders, one of the popular builders in the two subdivisions. “People who build two stories want a master bedroom and another bedroom, as well as two full baths downstairs because they are worried about their aging parents who will eventually move in with them, going up the stairs. One-story plans are very popular with baby boomers.”

Turk said along with granite countertops, hardwood cabinetry with flush drawers and doors, good-sized islands in the middle of the kitchen equipped with a sink, and stainless steel appliances, creating their own entertainment areas, with a card room or bar close to the swimming pool, are also trends.

“Estate-sized homes of 5,500 square feet and over have a play room upstairs as well as a billiard room adjacent to it,” Turk said. “They might also have a bar and a media room up there. If they have the wealth to do these things, it’s good trappings to keep their kids around the house as they grow up.”

Hand-scraped wood floors, which give the room a warm and distressed look while hiding imperfections in the wood grain, are also an elite trend.

“The cook top vent-a-hoods and goose neck faucets in back of stove top burners are another big thing,” Turk said. A recent listing of available homes in the Starwood subdivision include home descriptions which offer libraries, exercise rooms, out-

door kitchens, motor courts and conference centers in combination with the perhaps soon to be mundane study/media/game/bar rooms. Prices start around half a million dollars to well over \$1 million for these showstoppers.



After – Fireplace updated with slate & wood trim  
photo by John Scott Glass

### TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE

Other entertainment improve-

ments have surpassed the built-in cabinetry for televisions and other home electronics to proper storage and display of wine collections. Contrary to popular belief, a basement is not necessary for correct wine storage.

From wine rooms to wine cellars equipped with state-of-the-art cooling and humidity systems, custom home builders and model homes are increasingly including the vintage addition to their plans.

“I went to a Parade of Homes in the Starwood Subdivision a while ago and a third of the homes had built-in wine storage,” said Gary Daniels, president and CEO of Vineyard Wine Cellars in Frisco. “It’s one of the fastest growing trends in new homes.”

Daniels’ interest in wine began in a wine club, matured to touring the wine country, and developed his woodworking hobby into a job he chose to do part time during retirement.

“Men want a media room and a three or four-car garage.”

"I left the corporate world but I am real busy for a retirement job," he joked. "I just checked on a job where we excavated below the slab of the house to create a stone wine tasting room equipped with a 3,000-bottle cellar."

Roger and Shirley Lents, Starwood residents for about seven years, reflected on their house hunting adventures when moving to the Dallas area.

"We had decided on a house in McKinney when we came and looked at the house we live in now," Shirley Lents said. "We looked up at the high, high ceiling, crown molding and nodded to each other and said, 'this is it.' My husband also fell in love with the built-in wine storage area. That was his selling point."

Daniels said properly designed wine rooms, coolers, and storage depends on the needs of the homeowner as well as the number and kinds of bottles or cases of wine to be stored. Like the historic caves of Europe and California, the ideal storage environment should be dark, humid and cool to ensure maximum quality and fullest enjoyment of the wine.

In an ideal wine storage area, a constant temperature of 55 degrees will allow the wine to age gracefully. Of course, all wine bottles should be stored on their sides to keep the corks moist.

"Room preparation requirements include adequate insulation, exterior grade doors and vapor barriers," Daniels said. "There should be no exterior windows or doors and locations should be away from sources of vibration such as laundry rooms and HVAC equipment."



Another trend that has not quite enjoyed the acceptance as wine storage in these upscale residences is called the "smart home". A smart home has numerous automatic electronic controls that can be activated from remote locations or set to turn on and off by themselves. Some stoves now have the set cook time/end cook time switch on the control panel, a similar example of the theory.

"Smart homes came out awhile back but didn't sell very well in this area," said Steve Penhollow of Penhollow Custom Homes. "People didn't really see a need to be able to turn the shower on automatically when pulling into the garage or drawing and heating their bath water to a certain temperature while driving home from work, for example. There's a lot of technology gurus out there who could help you land the Space Shuttle from your bath tub if you wanted to."

Penhollow said that some people have opted to have their

homes wired to turn on their coffee pots for them or flip on the television when the garage door opens, but nothing too technologically advanced. Another common semi-smart home creation is managing lighting with controls and customizing sound and entertainment venues.

"You can have \$100,000 invested in wiring a new home if you want," he said. "Some people want to be able to change their music CDs from the back patio and have their entertainment be multipurpose. They also like to create mood lighting without having a bank of switches on the wall. A lot of people aren't pleased with banks of switches."

Like the Green Building Program, most smart homes are wired for conserving energy use, meaning lights turn off when no one is in the room. Smart homes can also control the air



*Do-It-Yourselfers, Lisa and Jason Smit of Frisco  
photo by John Scott Glass*

temperature and regulate it to be more energy efficient by turning the thermostat down when the homeowners are away.

"There are a couple subdivisions that are way ahead of the game in Frisco, because they have the fiber optic cable necessary to do these sorts of smart home things," Penhollow added. "I

know Lone Star Ranch is an advanced subdivision in technical wiring because of requirements in the deed restrictions. They have to have a certain amount of technical wiring."

Penhollow, who has been in the building industry for 23 years, joked and said, "I don't have a smart home though, I use a Clapper."

And though one of the newest housing additions to Frisco tends to look misleading, Frisco Square, located at the southeast corner of Dallas Parkway and Main Street – is also wired for technological advances.

World famous architects and builders ranging from Buescher and Quantum Custom Homes and the Westwood Group to architect David Schwartz (known for his high profile projects) are in the process of bringing a four million square foot mixed use multi-generational town center, complete with more than 300 luxury townhomes, elegant apartment flats, and

**"A lot of technology gurus could help you land the Space Shuttle from your bath tub."**



Burgundy Cellar

photo courtesy of Vineyard Wine Cellars, Inc

assisted-living facilities to Frisco.

“You’re supposed to picture people sitting outside, eating dinner at a sidewalk café, having everything they need within walking distance,” said director of marketing for Frisco Square Debby Hanson. “Once everything is built it will look like its been here forever. The developer is sparing no expense; he is even selecting 300-year-old stones versus the 100-year-old stones to create that old world feel.”

Though the developer, Cole McDowell of Five Star Development Co., Inc., plans to use the 147-acre plot to create a feeling reminiscent of by-gone days, the pricing surely reflects today’s economy.

Condominiums ranging from 1,400 to 1,800 square feet sell for about \$200,000 and residences from 2,800 square feet to 4,200 square feet sell for \$250,000 and \$500,000 respectively.

But everything about Frisco Square, whether examining the ground floor retail or restaurant venues or one of the living spaces, is created with green building standards and equipped with only the best.

“We have 18 different floor plans, granite counter tops, stainless steel sinks, ceramic tile floors, limited access entry and a fitness center,” said Frisco Square resident and business manager Brandy Castillo. “We also have community balconies, some with ceiling fans and some on the roof for that Manhattan feel. We’re more like a luxury hotel but feel like a home.”

“Most families are tired of home maintenance and want something different,” Castillo explained. “Once all the landscaping is in I know it will pick up even more.”

Numerous phases of buildings will incorporate the three or four story rust-colored limestone residences, some with major employers situated at the top floor while others will house commercial enterprises.

Even the windows in Frisco Square resemble a European style where they can go up and come down and fold out, some even have the crank out option. Most rooms have garden tubs and spacious walk-in closets. The kitchens have plant ledges above the cabinetry, are equipped with black appliances and many have

islands. Tulip light fixtures adorn the bathroom walls, as do sconce lights outside residents’ doors. Some have private courtyards.

There is also a free resort-style concierge service that will cater to residents’ every whim, whether they live in an Old World Style, Mediterranean, Traditional, French Country or Contemporary style-labeled residence.

“We are selling for about \$1 per square-foot per average even though we were appraised at \$1.25 per square-foot,” Castillo said. “We are doing that because we are under construction. As our residences grow, so will our amenities (like the hot tubs and martini bars now located by the pool). We’re also very high tech.”

Castillo is referring the Acuity Association network system where residents can set up different variations of their cable modems and computers to their liking. Unlike most homes, residents at Frisco Square have choices when it comes to their electronic capabilities. High-speed Internet access is also a given.

“Once the 17 parks and gardens and two water features are put in, it will be absolutely perfect living,” Castillo said.

“The reason to be here is lifestyle,” Hanson added. “Live, work, and play in Frisco Square. It will be Frisco’s new downtown. Anyone who drives into the development is blown away.”

“Ultimately the draw is City Hall which is built right smack dab in the middle of it,” said the city’s zoning and subdivision administrator Scott Ingalls. “The new library and the Heritage Center will be there too. It’s going to be really nice.”

Though the last passenger train traveled those famous tracks in December of 1967, people continue en masse to relocate, move to, or move back to Frisco in search of that perfect home. Few need a train or horse and buggy to accomplish this dream today.

*Natalie Medigovich is freelance writer from Frisco.*

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