

**BUILDER**

# THE NEW BACKYARD: THIRD-FLOOR TERRACES

To combat soaring land costs, builders and architects look for innovative ways to provide access to the outdoors.

By [Jennifer Goodman](#)



Eric Figge/Courtesy of RHA

Brookfield Residential's [Marlowe at Playa Vista](#)

Today's home buyers crave outdoor living, but with the cost of land soaring, builders face a quandary: how to offer private outdoor spaces without going over budget on land costs.

As plot sizes have diminished, Irvine, Calif.-based [Robert Hidey Architects](#) has come up with a novel solution that incorporates expansive third-floor great rooms that open onto large terraces. For their production builder clients, architects at the firm are using these spaces as substitutes for the traditional backyard. The firm is currently involved in three such projects in [California](#): two for Brookfield Residential, with third-floor great rooms that open through floor-to-ceiling retractable glass doors onto a covered terrace; and Toll Brothers' on-the-boards [Lexington](#) project that will include homes with third-floor great rooms and decks. Here, BUILDER talks with Robert Hidey Architects' project director Chris Barlow about the growing popularity of third-floor entertaining spaces.



Eric Figge/Courtesy of RHA

*Marlowe at Playa Vista*

## **What sparked the idea to put outdoor entertainment spaces on the third floor?**

With yard spaces a premium, residential developments are continually pushing into higher densities, and third floors are becoming much more prevalent. They are an economical way to add square footage to a home, since they don't increase the size of the footprint or roof area. At the same time, buyers are asking for secondary-use spaces that can facilitate a wide variety of social and entertainment functions, so it seems very natural to locate these spaces on the third floor. Third floors are more private and exclusive than first floors, lending these spaces a distinctly different character.

## **What do these spaces include?**

In some cases, the third floor is the solution for achieving the desired bedroom count, but recently several of our builder clients have asked us to develop the third floor as bonus living rooms, media rooms, games rooms, home offices, and fitness rooms. Wet bars and kitchenettes further enhance these spaces for entertaining.

Builders are also providing residential elevators for easy access from the first floor to the third. Large decks and patios are especially well suited for the third floor because at that height the views are dramatic and there is something very special about being up so high. This is equally true for high-density urban projects and low-density suburban projects.

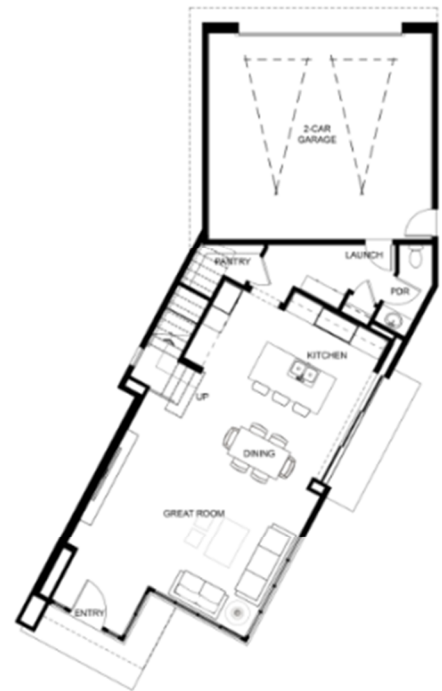
In urban settings like Marlowe at Playa Vista for Brookfield Residential, the third floor decks feel like an urban oasis. In some of our other projects in suburban settings, such as Lexington at Parkside in Lake Forest, Calif., for [Toll Brothers](#), the third floor decks offer a strong connection to surrounding nature.



THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

*Marlowe at Playa Vista Plan 2*

**How have buyers reacted to them?**

Buyers are very excited about bonus living spaces on third floors, and the flexibility of these spaces is a big reason why. When buyers see these spaces, they immediately start to picture how they intend to use them. In some cases, it is large families that want to provide kids with a space of their own. In other cases, buyers need a place for their hobbies or fitness activities. Other buyers picture the spaces as alternative venues for entertaining.

Builders understand that the third floors mean different things to different buyers, and they are offering additional packages to enhance a variety of lifestyles. Marlowe provides the flexible third-floor bonus room standard, but also offers a kitchenette, home office, or extra bedrooms, depending on buyer preference, whereas Lexington's Acadia Elite, Plan 4's 636-square-foot, third-story loft, with its wet bar and powder room and adjacent covered deck, is devoted entirely to entertaining.





Eric Figge/Courtesy RHA

*Marlowe at Playa Vista*

### **Is entertaining at home important to your clients these days?**

Entertaining at home is still extremely important to homebuyers today. Homes play host to family gatherings, social events, recreation, and even professional functions. Entertaining takes many forms, and buyers are looking for homes that can do it all.

## **Will the third floor overtake the kitchen as the main entertainment center of the home?**

It really depends on the activity. Certainly the kitchen is still the entertainment center of the home when it comes to large groups and anything involving food or drink. Builders continue to ask us to include a wide variety of options to support the kitchen such as secondary catering kitchens, beverage centers, wine rooms, and outdoor kitchens. Yet, not every social event is a large cocktail party, so secondary use spaces are becoming popular. These flexible spaces can host a variety of activities, and in many cases they are a more appropriate venue than the kitchen.

### ***About the Author***



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