

# DESIGN AND GRAPHICS

## HOME OWNER DECISIONS

### **1. What rooms do I need?**

Make a list of all rooms you currently have and their approximate sizes. Are they big enough? Too large? Are there rooms that you need that you don't have in your existing home? Bring your "wish list" to our first meeting. I will try to incorporate all your needs into your new design.

### **2. What should my ceiling heights be?**

The standard ceiling height on the first and second floors is 8'-0", although many custom homes presently being built have 9'-0" first floor ceilings, and 8'-0" second floor ceilings. Higher-end homes occasionally have 10'-0" first floor ceiling heights on the first level. It's up to you. Keep in mind that with higher ceilings, taller windows are recommended. If you intend to put transoms over your first floor windows you will need a minimum 9'-0" first floor ceiling height.

Building a cathedral ceiling in the master bedroom, for example, is an economical way of adding volume without increasing the entire second floor ceiling height.

In determining your basement ceiling height, keep in mind that it will vary depending on the method of foundation wall construction. A typical basement wall is 12 courses high, which is 8'-0", and finishes out to 7'-9 1/2". Clients sometimes increase the wall height to 13 courses and achieve an 8'-5 1/2" ceiling height. If you wish to have poured concrete foundation walls instead of block, the walls are built using forms, and are either 8'-0" high or 9'-0" high. The upgrade here is in specifying that the contractor use the 9'-0" forms, which results in a finished basement ceiling height of 8'-9 1/2". A custom homebuilder will build taller walls for you if you desire it.

### **3. Do I want 2x4 or 2x6 exterior walls?**

This decision, which may seem minor to you at the beginning, is a very crucial one for the designer/drafter; the earlier this decision is made the better. Some people elect to use 2x6 wood studs in their exterior walls if they plan to install 5-1/2" fiberglass batt insulation in their outside walls, or if they particularly like deep window sills. It is a nice look if you have the budget for it. The majority of people, however, stay with 2x4 studs on their outside walls.

### **4. What kind of roof design did you have in mind? Roof pitches?**

How a house looks from the road (curb appeal) really makes or breaks the design. Although many features play into how a house looks the roof really cinches it. Look at other homes to get an idea of your roof pitch. A 4/12 pitch will cost less than an 8/12, but does not have the headroom for attic space.

### **5. What defines my "dream kitchen"?**

I spend more time talking with my clients about the kitchen than any other part of the house, with the occasional exception of the master bath. The kitchen is usually the social center of the house and takes careful planning. The drawings that I create for you will show locations of the sink, dishwasher, range, and refrigerator. I do not do detailed cabinetry layouts, because the kitchen cabinetry manufacturer will do their own plans in-house when you select cabinets from them. However I do need to decide where all those major appliances will be installed. The "work triangle" concept helps me do this. It is the distance from the front of the sink, to the front of the refrigerator, to the front of the range. Total length of the three legs of the triangle should be under 23'-0" for maximum efficiency.

Islands are a good place for family and friends to congregate while the cook prepares dinner. We can discuss placement of a cook-top or a vegetable sink in an island. Seating at the island is important also. However, if you don't have room for an island, a peninsula might be a possibility. Another feature of an efficient kitchen is a pantry cabinet - I try to fit one in whenever possible. A walk-in pantry is even better. Finally, consider the idea of having a computer desk somewhere in the vicinity of the kitchen/breakfast nook. A cooking parent can supervise a child while on the Internet.

### **6. What about windows?**

The style of windows you want is up to you. Double-hung windows have a traditional look, while casements lend themselves to more contemporary styles. It is best not to mix styles of windows, with the exception of installing a double casement over the kitchen sink, even if the rest of the house uses double-hungs, because it's easier to lean over a sink and crank open a casement window than it is to lift the bottom sash of a double-hung.

There are other window issues as well:

## **6. What about windows? (continued)**

**Grilles:** grilles divide the window into rectangles. You can omit them from the design entirely, go with a "standard" grill pattern, or designate a custom design (prairie style, for example). Depending on the window manufacturer, you may select false grilles which snap into the inside of the sash, grilles-between-the-glass, or "true divided light" windows, which are like traditional wood windows, in that each pane of glass is its own separate little window.

**Tempering:** keep in mind that if the bottom of a window is within 18" of the floor, of stair treads, or of a tub platform, the glass must be "tempered". The manufacturer pre-stresses the glass so that if it breaks, it will not shatter into sharp shards. It is a small additional expense. If you are on a very tight budget you may want to keep this in mind as we put together the design of your house.

**Window manufacturer:** if a client is unsure of a window manufacturer I generally specify "Andersen" window model numbers, since they are so well known. If the supplier of a different window brand were to provide you with a price quote, he would recognize the Andersen numbers and translate into his product line accordingly. However, I do have catalogs for many different window brands, and I will gladly specify a particular brand if the client knows from the beginning that he plans on using it, instead of Andersen. All the more popular windows have the same basic sizes in casements and double-hung, but when getting into unusual shapes and sizes, some manufacturers have stock items while others have custom.

## **7. What finish materials shall I use on the outside of my new home?**

You have your choice of several traditional finishes: brick, siding, stone, cultured stone, and EIFS ("Dryvit" is a recognized trade name). I like to work more than one material into a design; for example, Dryvit on the majority of the house, with cultured stone to the bottom of the first floor windowsills and around the entry. If you like the look of stone, consider cultured stone as an economical alternative. It is helpful to me if you take pictures of the fronts of homes you've driven by and liked.

Trim (rake boards, fascias, freize boards, etc.) are usually wood, although synthetic materials are increasingly popular for their no-maintenance features. You may wish to merely wrap your wood trim in vinyl or aluminum. For a historically accurate look, I would specify instead that the wood trim be primed and painted, in which case you would need to paint it every few years.

Most clients select fiberglass/asphalt shingles for the roof. You may wish to have cedar shakes, standing-seam metal, or slate instead. Standing-seam metal is recommended for low roof pitches. The decision to use slate should be made before the truss manufacturer begins designing the roof trusses, due to the added weight.

## **8. Do I need a finished basement?**

You may not even want to think about the expense of finishing the basement in your new home now, but you will probably consider it in the future. When I'm working out the structural supports in your basement I try to envision the possible future uses for the basement. The columns are placed accordingly, so that they would either be encapsulated by future walls, or could be wrapped to look like decorative columns and not be in the way. I can even position the columns with a future pool table in mind! If you plan on having a fireplace somewhere on your first floor, and think you may want to finish your basement at some point in time, it's a good idea to install a flue for a future basement fireplace as well. Roughing-in for a future bathroom in the basement is another smart investment. Even if you never do put a bathroom in your basement, it's good for the resale value - the next owner might want to put one down there. Also, it's much cheaper to rough in the plumbing for it before the slab is poured, than to have to break up the slab to do it later. Clients sometimes want a bedroom in the basement. The grade conditions of the lot will determine if this is possible, because you need to have a large enough window to escape the bedroom in the event of a fire (per the building codes). If your lot is flat, a special window well can be used to allow for a full-size window in the basement bedroom.

## **9. How do I plan for possible future modifications to my house?**

If your new custom home is the place you intend to spend the rest of your life, please take future needs into consideration. It is a good idea to situate the Master Suite on the first floor, with wider doors and more spacious walk-in closets and Master Bath, so that future handicapped accessibility won't be a problem. It is easier to design for this now than to retrofit later. Perhaps your design dictates that the master suite be on the second floor; in that case, the staircase should be designed as a straight run, so that a future mechanical lift could be installed at the stair.

Most clients desire a deck at some point. We can work together in locating basement windows so that they would not interfere with the future placement of that deck. I have had clients express an interest in a future screened porch as well, and we have positioned second floor windows above the location of the future screened porch so as not to interfere with the future porch roof.

For houses that have a separate garage module attached to the main house by a connecting "breezeway", I suggest using. Perhaps you have always wanted a brick home, but know that your budget won't allow anything but vinyl siding for the time being. I can specify a 4" ledge along the outside perimeter of your foundation, so that in the future you could remove the siding and use that ledge to support brick veneer.

## **10. What are some basic room sizes?**

Room sizes for certain types of rooms will vary widely based on the caliber of home. Here are some general guidelines:

**Two-Car Garages** should be at least 24'-0" wide x 24'-0" deep. When I draw preliminary floor plans, I show two cars in the garage, so you can see how much space will be left around them. I like to design garages with a little more "elbow room", especially since most clients wish to have a small workbench or store lawn equipment; I recommend at least 22'-0" x 22'-0". You might consider upgrading the size of the garage doors from a standard 8'-0" wide door to a 9'-0" door. If you have an SUV or other tall vehicle, you should upgrade the door height from 7'-0" to 8'-0" as well.

**Living Room/Great Room/Family Room** will vary widely. I ask that you let me know how you intend to use the room and we'll size these rooms accordingly.

**Kitchens** will vary widely as well, so I'm not even going to put down a size here. If there are any islands or counter peninsulas, there shall be a minimum walkway between counters of 3'-0". I try to increase that to 3'-6" at least, whenever possible.

**Dining Rooms** will be sized according to the size of your dining room table and the sizes of any buffets or sideboards you plan on having in the room. I can show the outlines of the furniture on your floor plan. A good rule of thumb here is to allow 3'-0" from the edge of the table to the nearest point (wall or piece of furniture), so that you avoid hitting the back of the chair against anything while standing up from the table.

**Breakfast Nook:** the nook size depends on the size and shape of table you wish to have there, and the number of chairs. I try to follow the 3'-0" chair rule that I use for Dining Rooms (see above). Oftentimes there is a French door or a sliding patio door from the nook to a deck or patio, and it is important to provide adequate clearance between the nook table and that door.

**Powder Room** dimensions will depend on plumbing fixture placement. If the toilet and sink are opposite each other, I advise approximately 3'-1" x 6'-9". When the fixtures are beside each other, the Powder Room should measure at least 5'-1" x 5'-1".

**Laundry Room:** allow 5'-8" min. in width for a side-by-side washer/dryer. 6'-0" is better. There should be at least 8'-0" in length if you wish to include a laundry tub beside the washer. Allow 6'-0" minimum total room depth, so that there is room for you to actually stand in front of the machines. If the washer/dryer is just a closet with double doors, not a separate "room", the closet needs to be at least 3'-0" deep.

**Bathroom:** allow 5'-0" for a standard tub. A standard rectangular bathroom, where the vanity, toilet, and tub are all in a straight line, requires 5'-0" x 7'-9". Bathrooms can vary widely in size.

## **10. What are some basic room sizes? (continued)**

**Clothing closets** must finish out to 2'-0" deep. My drawings show dimensions to rough framing, not drywall, so the dimension will read 2'-1" on the blueprints. Walk-in closets with clothes on both sides should be at least 6'-0" wide to allow a comfortable walking aisle.

**Stairs** must be at least 3'-0" wide. On a standard home, the staircase from first to second floor may be either 3'-0" or 3'-6" in width. A more lavish home will usually have a minimum 48" wide stair.

**Hallways** must be at least 3'-0" wide, but I almost never design one that narrow, especially if the hallway is in a heavily-traveled portion of the house. On the main floor it's best to use 3'-6" minimum hallways, and in larger homes, 4'-0" is the minimum.

**Bedrooms** shall be sized according to how you intend to use each bedroom. I like to allow room for a queen-size bed and nightstands, even in secondary bedrooms, unless you instruct me otherwise. I will locate each bedroom's doors and windows to maximize wall space for furniture positioning. A child's room may be 10' x 11' or 11' x 12' in a modest home, 13' x 15' in a larger home. The master bedroom should be about 14' x 15' in a modest home, 16' x 18' in a larger one.