



Creating Your Dream Home

The first step in creating your dream home is to commit yourself to it. Schedule time each day for planning and exploring your ideas. If your ideas are a little fuzzy, that's all the more reason to set aside time now to focus them. If you seriously feel that you don't have time to plan a home, consider buying an existing one, or bring your vision to life by remodeling or restoring an existing home.

But once you've made that all-important commitment to building a home, bear in mind that the basic vision you start with may not be the one you'll end up with. You'll need hours of reading as well as long talks with your family and friends to evolve and perfect your plans. After all, you're planning a haven for your personal happiness and satisfaction!

Formulate your ideas

Building a home is expensive. But talk is cheap, so take advantage of it. Exhaust the resources in your quest for knowledge or advice about your new home. Start by talking things over with your family. After all, they'll be the ones living in the new place. So ask them what they'd like to see in their new home.

Strange to say, this isn't the stage to start thinking about money. So for now, forget the bucks! Nothing can squash your creativity faster than the thought that something you want can't or won't be possible. There will be plenty of time to criticize and discuss finances later on.

But for right now...

Buy books. Go to the library and check out architectural books that feature photographs that appeal to you. Keep notes and write down questions as they come to you. Read home-decorating magazines. Clip and save pictures of houses, cedar closets, decks and landscaping details as visual stimuli for your project. Start a folder or portfolio for all of your wonderful ideas. After you have a stack, take them out and set them side by side to see how they strike you. These images will help make your dream clearer.

Pretend that your big picture window overlooks a vegetable garden, or an in-ground pool, or a large, green backyard with bird feeders over by the maple trees.

This is truly the time to brainstorm your ideas. Remember: No concept is too wild, nor is any idea too silly. Absolutely no criticism will be accepted at this time!

Finally, when your brainstorming has run its course, take time to review and evaluate your ideas. Draw up a list of the thoughts and concepts you find most exciting and useful to your vision. Then try to determine whether or not some of those "ridiculous" notions have a hint of genius in them. If you've run out of ideas, take your elements and begin to mix and match them.

You just might discover the beginnings of a work of art!

Make a "wish list"

As your ideas solidify, formalize them in a written "wish list."

Such a list is more than just a useful tool. Think of it as a magic mirror that allows you to see the amazing possibilities your new home has to offer. However, like a magic mirror, your wish list may raise some difficult questions. Certainly, at one point or another, these questions must be addressed with a combination of honesty, practicality and vision. Treat wishes as realities that are within your grasp..

For example, one of the hardest questions is: "Where to live?" There are variables as far as the eye can see. Do you want to live in the city, where public transportation and emergency services are nearby? Perhaps a home in the suburbs or in a development is more to your liking. The schools are relatively close by, and work is only a short commute. Maybe you'd like to "get away from it all" and build your dream home in a wooded area with a fishing hole just down the hill. The choices are as myriad as people and lifestyles. It's up to you to decide what area best suits your needs.

There are no bad wishes, and no wish is too wild. Treat wishes as realities that are within your grasp. Remember: The more you wish for, the more you may get!

Your next step: Research homes inside and out

Now that you have a stack of wishes and ideas, it's time to do some formal research.

The next thing you need to do is grab a camera and start taking pictures of homes in your area that contain architectural and design elements that appeal to you, based on your ideas. Look for the obvious touches. Does the home have a front and/or back porch? Does the home have an attached garage? Is there a chimney? Do you like the landscaping? Are the exterior lighting elements in harmony with the home's design? (You might consider driving around during the evening to see how creative those lighting possibilities can be.)

If you don't have a camera right now, try one of those user-friendly, "disposable" box cameras. You can find these in almost every camera shop, as well as drugstores and supermarkets. Add your photos to your portfolio, along with your magazine clippings.

Now that your exterior research is started, start collecting ideas for the interior design of your new home.

A good place to begin is with "open houses." You'll find these listed in the real estate ads in your local newspaper. These houses will come in a variety of shapes, sizes and ages; from the antique and classic, to houses so new that "Wet Paint" signs still adorn the woodwork. In addition, take day trips to new developments in your area where "model homes" can be found. By literally "looking in" on a wide range of homes in realistic settings, you'll begin to determine what details to consider when designing your new home.

At the same time you will begin to see what a new home will cost.

Don't forget to ask friends and relatives for tours of their homes, because floor space and floor plans are the essentials you now need to start considering. Your family and friends will give you unbiased, practical advice on how certain designs and floor plans have worked for them and on things they would do differently.

Notice the details and construction materials used in all the homes you visit. Look to see how the appliances you desire can fit into different spaces. To get a better idea of what you like and dislike, notice things like floors and doors, as well as the type of windows.

Older homes often are constructed from local materials. In earlier years, local materials were used to minimize shipping costs and transportation of heavy materials. Local materials also gave the home a sense of place because the stonework and woodwork reflected the area's natural characteristics.

Start looking at materials and products

Your task here is to identify and define construction materials and design elements that appeal to you, and then note them for future reference. If you've taken good notes and been filling up your portfolio, then you should now be looking at specific products and materials for your home. Here - as in every phase of your planning - you will have multiple options and resources, and making these decisions now will save you a considerable amount of time and money later.

Visits to RIBA's annual spring [Home Show](#) of manufacturers and retail sales outlets are an efficient way to learn about the latest advances in home products, services and materials. Not only will you be able to see and touch things such as bathroom fixtures and appliances, but you will have a chance to view these products in fully built displays. Also, these showrooms may have diagrams and sample floor plans to show you how all of these elements combine to help make a new home.

Visit the lumberyard

Lumberyards and building-materials suppliers provide a wealth of information on basic building materials such as wood, roofing, windows, doors and flooring. Your local lumberyard is also an excellent place to get in touch with local builders and contractors.

Check your newspaper for advertisements - or call RIBA - about home-building seminars. For a small investment of time and money, you'll receive valuable information about what it will take to successfully build a home in your area. These seminars may focus on materials, local building codes, planning and zoning laws, financing your project or combinations of all these topics. Before you go, draw up a list of questions to ask the speakers.

With all this under your belt, it's time to get down to the nitty gritty: Actually working out a floor plan for your dream.