



## Planning Your Dream Home

Now that you've firmed up your ideas, have a wish list and have done some research, it's time to start some serious planning.

How do you determine the best room size? Well, take a look at your daily routine. Does your family like to congregate in the kitchen or the dining room? What if you combine the kitchen and dining room into one large communal area? Do you need two bedrooms or three? Will your rooms accommodate all your furniture? All this will help you determine the "preferred size" of each room.

If you don't have one already, get a good tape measure because now is the time to start measuring rooms in your current home, or the home of a relative or friend. Or you could just take another trip over to that model home you visited last week. After taking measurements, add all the figures and come up with square feet for each room. You now have the approximate square footage of your once "imaginary" dream home!

### Likes and dislikes in your current home

What could make your home more pleasant? At the same time you plan your room sizes, write down what you like and dislike about your current home. Of course, when you evaluate each room of your current home, be sure to apply the same combination of honesty, practicality and vision you used in drafting your wish list.

When you've finished evaluating your home, take a step back and carefully consider your answers. If your research shows that you're basically satisfied with your present home, then all you need to do is review your comments, mark what appeals to you, and incorporate them into your new home's design. But if you're basically dissatisfied, then "close the door" on your old home and start designing your new one from scratch.

Go back to your file or portfolio on houses and rooms that you liked, and try to notice features that captured your interest. Ask yourself whether it was the shape of the room, the use of windows, lighting or the ceiling height that grabbed your attention.

As you go through this part of your planning, make a new list of likes and dislikes, then apply the same system of research and discovery to every room in your home. You'll be pleasantly surprised to see the shape of your new home beginning to take on a concrete form!

### Looking at house plans

By now you should have two strong indicators of what your new home could look like: square footage of rooms, and features that you like. If you're fairly close to a consensus on these two points, then you're ready to start looking at house plans that conform to the general shape and size you have defined.

Start looking through books of house plans, which will let you view and compare many different configurations. Plan books also can give you ideas on laying out a logical floor plan.

Go back to your "likes and dislikes" list and plug in some of your preferences. For example, does this plan have a basement, or does it rest on a concrete slab? Would a washer and dryer fit into a separate laundry room, or could they be placed in a closet near the bathroom? Where will the heating and/or air conditioning systems go?

Your responses to the previous questions will result in even more questions about your preferences in room size, which in turn will help you locate and choose which floor plans best fit your personal vision. When visualizing each room in your new home, consider what will be in that room: sofas, tables and chairs are

obvious space takers. Also figure in kitchen appliances, home entertainment centers, art pieces and any other objects that need to fit into your new floor plan.

While exploring plan books, you may find the perfect, no questions asked, "Let's build this one just as it is right now!" floor plan. But remember, there are many variables and many personal preferences.

### Creating rough sketches

Start making your plan with rough sketches. You don't need a drafting table. A small kitchen table and a soft, #2 leaded pencil with a good eraser will do nicely. Some people like to use bluelined graph paper to draw on because it's easier to create squares and rectangles when they have hundreds of little boxes. Still, a plain, white, 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper will do.

When you first put your pencil to paper, start with a diagram that lays out, in a very general way, where you think each room should be. You can use rectangles, squares or circles. The areas themselves are "dimensionless" at this time. The purpose of this exercise is just to get your ideas down on paper.

First, close your eyes and imagine the front door to your new home. Now reach for the doorknob and swing the door open. What do you see there? A foyer with a coat rack on the wall? A tiled floor that leads to an elegant staircase? Perhaps a long hallway with antique side tables, and doors opening into rooms on either side of the hall. Whatever you decide, set it down on paper.

From there, sketch out the approximate location of the room or rooms you'd like to see next to your first room, and then draw the rooms that you think best fit next to those rooms. Proceed through the first floor of the "house" until all rooms are in place. Move your rooms around as needed until you feel comfortable with the results. Now connect these imaginary rooms with lines and arrows that represent walls and doors.

In an "open plan," all the larger rooms are completely or partially open to each other. In a "closed plan," each large room is clearly defined as separate, with walls and doors. You can try a combination plan in which the kitchen, breakfast and family rooms are open to one another, and all the remaining rooms are distinct and closed.

Study your arrows and use them to get a sense of traffic flow in and around your rough sketch.

Repeat this exercise for the second floor. If you have a third floor or finished basement in your plan, try sketches of those too.

Keep each of your diagrams in your file or portfolio in case you decide at a later date that rough sketch "A" is more desirable or practical than rough sketch "B." These drawings also will enable a designer or contractor to help formalize your vision when it comes time to create or customize your blueprints.

### You're on your way

There's much more homework and research ahead of you. But you're already more prepared to realize the home of your dreams now than when you first began this endeavor. Sometimes your progress will seem unbelievably slow, but remember the original equation of 80% preparation versus 20% construction? If you've arrived at this stage with all your homework done, CONGRATULATIONS! You're 10% there!

Now it's time to see if your dream can fit your wallet.