

Tips for Designing Your Dream Home

Written by Michael Tsompanas

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1. Start Simple

You don't need fancy software to begin making decisions about your custom home plan. Really, all you need is a pencil and a piece of paper. Sketch your ideas. Brainstorm. Make lists of features you want each room to have – just get your ideas out of your head and onto paper. Even rough sketches can help your home design team understand what you want.

2. Think About Your Future

Do you have or plan on having children in the coming years? Do you have aging parents? If so, you'll need to think about accommodating close family members in many different scenarios, such as returning college students, accommodating grandchildren and grandparents, taking care of elderly parents – even accommodating extended family for holiday occasions. Likewise, if you're hoping to transition from an office job to operating your own business out of your home, your custom home design should include an office or flexible space. Basically, when you think about the amenities in your custom home plan, you are deciding what kind of family you'd like to become. Include features your future self will find handy.

3. Showcase + Maximize Your Lot

Oftentimes, those who are in the market for a custom house plan already own the property where the home will be located. If you already know where your custom home will be situated, be sure to consider the topography, size and best features of the lot. For instance, if your lot overlooks a naturalscape, you might choose to face the living room toward the feature so your family members can watch nature in action. Alternatively, if you have a brook or stream running through your property, you might choose to place bedrooms nearest the stream so you can enjoy the beautiful sound of running water while you sleep.

In addition to thinking about which windows should face the home's best views, you'll want to consider whether the land is sloped. A custom home design for a steep slope will look very different than a design for a flat lot.

4. Prioritize Your Dream Features

Once your ideas are recorded in rough form, begin prioritizing features for your new house. Custom home design can easily exceed a budget if you let your fancies run amok. With so many luxuries to choose from, it's important to prioritize the most important aspects of your design. For instance, if you've always dreamed about a box window in the kitchen where you can grow herbs, you may want to prioritize that over installing a line to facilitate a gas stove.

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5. Consider Function + Flow

As you and your designer begin playing around with where various rooms should be located, consider how your final design will flow and how your family might function in each space. For instance, to reduce noise in sleeping areas, it's wise to place bedrooms away from the communal areas of the house. Likewise, if you're the kind of family that tends to gather around the kitchen, an open floor plan with easy flow between the living room, kitchen and dining area will suit you well. This kind of design also allows for excellent flow between rooms.

6. Reflect On Natural + Controlled Lighting

Light has a powerful influence on humans. Indeed, in areas that see little natural light during the winter months, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is not unusual. This disorder brings feelings of depression, along with weight gain, daytime sleepiness, social withdrawal and lethargy. If you have suffered from SAD in the past, or if you're moving to a place with long, cloudy winters (such as the Pacific Northwest), it is smart to add skylights to your custom house plan in order to maximize the natural light in your home. Heck, even if you've never felt sad on a cloudy day, skylights are smart because they reduce the need for artificial light and provide as much as 30 percent more light than vertical windows.

Light also figures into the placement of rooms in a custom home plan. As an example, if you want to enjoy natural morning light in your dining nook, it would be wise to face the nook east, where it will catch the morning sun.

It's also wise to think carefully about how electrical lights in your home will facilitate comfort. For instance, a custom home designer would suggest installing bright task lighting for kitchen countertops to facilitate food preparation. Lighting can also create a mood – for example, dimming sconces in the bedroom can create a sense of romance or peace.

Meditating on the items listed above can help you create the home of your dreams. As you work with your home designer, take your time. Remember that it's far easier to be upfront about what you do and do not like than it will be to remodel your custom home later.