

PUTNAM ARCHITECTS PROGRAMMING FOR YOUR NEW HOME

Before starting on drawings, or even estimating the size and shape of the home, you will need to agree on a basic design program. You might as well start by listing everything you would like. Quite possibly you may need to pare down the list to stay within your budget; at that point you will need to prioritize. Start with primary decisions and put some flesh on the bones as your concepts evolve.

Often a smaller home of good design and quality construction will serve you better than some of the grand things we now see on the market. If you have not read Sarah Susanka's book "The Not So Big House", I recommend you do, although I must say I don't consider some of the sketches and photos represent a truly small house. I've certainly designed smaller, as well as larger.

Use care in selecting a site. In addition to the obvious issues like sun and wind exposures, neighborhood, size and shape, it pays to look at zoning and sensitive area issues such as wetlands, erosion, seismic implications. These will affect how you use your site, and how your surroundings will develop.

Do you want a pristine environment with everything in its place, or do you expect kids and dogs to run in and out, and can tolerate a little sand on the floor? Your Architect will need to know you and your life style to create a home that you will really enjoy. Like to garden? To paint? Create pottery? Read a lot? Your home should help you enjoy the things you like to do. Collect sketches, magazine or book extracts, and photos. If there are things you really want to avoid, be sure to add them to your collection. You may know of other homes you really like, and want your Architect to see.

People

How many people will share the home?

- Mom, Dad, children (ages)
- Others, full time or most of the time
- Guests (how many for parties, for dinner)
- Guests (how many for overnight stays)

Do any of these people have special needs or handicaps, or should the design accommodate future conditions?

- No steps between the house and garage and parking
- 3' interior doors and halls a bit wider than usual
- Accessible bathrooms, kitchen or laundry
- Elevator

- Other special needs

Budget

- What is your budget, including design fees, permitting, and construction of your home and major site work, such as landscaping, driveways and utilities. This number usually includes major appliances, floor and wall coverings, light fixtures and plumbing fixtures. Budget separately for drapes and furniture. Keep in mind that in some jurisdictions, sales tax applies to everything.
- You should have a contingency fund; hopefully none of it will be used, but a 10 to 15% overrun should not turn into a crisis. Some of my clients have been so enthused while watching the construction of their new home that they upgraded and spent a lot more than 15%!

Schedule

- How soon would you like to move in?
- How flexible are you about the schedule? Speed often costs money, and in the case of permitting authorities, they often cannot accelerate processes even if they want to.

The “recognized” styles

Some groups of features are commonly seen together and are recognized as representing a particular style. Some are fairly restrictive, while others include quite a range of buildings. If you prefer a particular style, it's probably best to choose an Architect that can show you projects that you find appealing.

- Historic styles, such as Tudor, Georgian, Regency or Federal.
- More common American styles, such as Colonial, Arts and Crafts, or the Modern movement
- Regional styles, such as New England Salt Box, Mission, or the Pacific Northwest style emphasizing wood interiors and exteriors and broad protective roofs.

More Flexible approach

Many homes take features from a variety of styles without worrying too much about names. I'm not addicted to any one style, and have designed flat roofs, garden roofs, peaked roofs, from one level to six levels, rectangular, angular, sprawling, and curved homes; homes on stilts in the woods, and earth beamed homes. Your family needs and lifestyle should be major factors, but don't overlook your neighborhood. I recommend a consistent harmonious balance of interior and exterior themes, using a minimum number of materials.

- Most sites have some limits on views. Which rooms have highest priority for the view?
- Do you want a maximum of glass, minimum window coverings, a very open relationship to the outdoors, or do you like restrained glass areas with space for stacking drapes?
- Flat or sloped ceilings, in all or part of the home?
- Do you like interior spaces that are quite open, such as kitchen, dining and living rooms that flow together? Would you rather certain rooms be separated, such as the dining room from the kitchen and or living room?
- Do you favor clean and spare interiors with most wall and ceiling surfaces painted? How about interiors that are mostly painted, but have some natural wood paneling and trim? Interiors that include posts, beams, planked walls or floors or ceilings?
- How about interior use of masonry (stone or brick) for fireplace, walls, floors?
- Do you have paintings, sculpture, photographs or anything else you like to collect and display?
- Books: Incidental or a design feature? How many and where? Keep in furniture or built-in shelving? One client's achieves included 6,000 volumes; don't forget to mention this sort of thing. In addition to requiring space, it explains quite a bit about your interests and way of life.
- TV and related media systems: Where and how big? Only in the TV room? In the living, dining, kitchen, bath, bedrooms and most everywhere else? For one client, I provided a pair of large sets that descended out of the bedroom ceiling upon the touch of switches in either bedside console.

Media equipment takes space and tends to control room acoustics and furniture placement. Direct sun spoils the picture. It's hard to bring major systems in later if you don't plan in advance.

- The list could go on and on. Add comments as you like.

Room Specifics

Include as much information as you can. What is important, and what you can do without. Avoid adding things at the last minute.

Entry

- Separated from living areas vs. fairly open.
- Somewhat formal, or pegs and boot racks, etc.

Living

The names of living areas seem to evolve over time. Living Room, Family Room, Great Room, Game Room, Media Room, etc. Few of us can afford one of each, or want to furnish and maintain all that space. The real issue: do you want one room to serve all purposes, or would you like some activities segregated? Valid reasons for separating spaces usually relate to noise control or social setting.

- One room?
- Separate room(S)?
- For each room, how many people should fit comfortably in the space?
- What special furniture or equipment will be in the rooms? Wood stoves, fireplaces, pianos, pool tables and such will obviously impact the room size, orientation and the amount and placement of glass.

Dining

Add spice to life and to meals by occasionally changing where you eat.

- How many people will be seated? For normal meals? Maximums? (with big groups, could some spill over to portable tables in another area?)
- A separate dining room?
- A dining area within one or more of the living areas?
- A bar or breakfast nook in the kitchen?
- Convenient access to eating on an outside deck or patio?
- Do you want a built in sideboard or furniture?
- Some people have extensive collections of dishes or silver; do you need storage or display space for these?

Kitchen

Major issues relate to how much you like to cook, and what appliances you like. A gourmet cook, or a husband and wife team, will clearly take more than the minimum space. If you like wide commercial style ranges and the big side by side refrigerators and freezers, they will crowd out counters, cabinets and food storage unless the kitchen is generously sized. Do you like:

- In-line, U-shaped, or island kitchens? I encourage the use of an island any time more than one person will work in the kitchen at the same time.

- Self contained range with oven(s) or separate cooktop and wall oven(s). Standard units are usually not over 30" wide; if you like larger units, get as specific as you can.
- A warming oven, grille, microwave or other special built-ins?
- A refrigerator with freezing space, and or a separate freezer? If you want a separate freezer, do you want it in the kitchen or perhaps a pantry or laundry room?
- A dishwasher, garbage compactor, disposal? Best not to plan on using a disposal if you are on a septic tank system.
- Single or double sink? Separate bar or vegetable sink?
- How many accessory appliances do you use, such as a toaster, mixer, bread maker, cappuccino machine? Do you want these to sit out on the counter, be in cabinets or in an appliance garage?

Other locations: You may want a simple wet bar or something more complete in other locations, such as in a family room, the Master Suite, or out on the deck.

Food Storage, Pot & Pan storage

For some people, space in the kitchen cabinets may be adequate. Others like to do home canning or to buy foods by the case. They stock up for surprise visitors or to avoid frequent shopping trips.

- Do you want pantry cabinets in the kitchen, or separate walk-in pantry with storage space for seldom used dishes, pots and pans?

Laundry/Utility/Mud Room

Usually these are all in one room, but sometimes we provide second sets in large or multi-story homes.

- Basic: side by side washer and drier
- Counter with deep sink (if the laundry is near the kitchen, mighty handy for leaving big things to soak)
- Built-in pull down ironing board
- Clothes hanging space
- Central Vacuum system
- Cleaning equipment (or in one or more closets)
- Storage shelves or cabinets

- Closet or hanging pegs, bench and boot drying
- Access to the garage or outdoors

Bedrooms

- Master Bedroom (1?)
- Children's Bedrooms (number?)
- Guest Rooms (number?)

What furniture, built-ins, and clothes storage in each room?

- Type/size of bed(s), king, queen, single(s), bunks
- Chests, desk, chairs, perhaps a casual seating and snack area in the Master Bedroom (escape from your teenagers)
- Clothes storage, number of lineal feet of clothes pole and shelving
- Wardrobes or walk ins

Bathrooms

How many? Typically, we end up with a special bath accessible only to the master bedroom, one or more family bath(s) accessed from the hall, and a powder room available to the public. Some like more private baths, such as a part of a guest suite. How about easy access from the yard or beach? Would you like an outdoor shower?

- Master Bath (1?)
- Family Bath (number?)
- Others

Fixtures, note for each bath

- Water closet
- Bidet
- One or two sinks, pedestal or cabinet mounted
- Shower sized for one or two people
- Standard tub
- Oversized tub with water pump and jets

- Screened outdoor shower accessed from the bathroom

Other rooms or spaces

- Home office, and should this be directly accessible from the entry hall, have its own outdoor entry, or be located elsewhere in the house?
- Sauna
- Storage for hobby equipment such as skis or bikes, gardening, wine making, etc.
- Hobby rooms or hobby storage in living or family rooms, such as space for arts and crafts, wood working, potting, etc.
- Space for plantings, such as glassed in bay windows or sun rooms, or a green roof or deck
- Indoor or outdoor soaking tub or swimming pool
- Outdoor living spaces including decks and patios. Which rooms should have direct access?

Garage or carport

Often we design these as free standing buildings, perhaps with a breezeway to the house. Depending on the site, a separate garage may help create a sheltered yard area. In any case, separation means less noise and less smell, but a little more walking distance.

- Prefer a free standing garage or a garage that is part of the house?
- Storage for how many cars, vans, boats, etc?
- Ceiling and door height to accommodate tall vehicles or hobbies?

Mechanical, Electrical and Telecommunications Equipment

- Should the house be wired for a computer network? Which rooms? It's a devil of a system to put in later. Be careful of relying on wireless; I abandoned mine when our neighbor got the same trade name and we couldn't separate signals.
- Do you like radiant heat or a forced air system? Air conditioning? Special attention to low energy consumption?
- Standby or manual backup electrical generation?
- Telephone, security, alarm and intercom systems?

Summary

This list may look like a long one, but I assure you lots of other issues will come up as the project moves ahead. The more things addressed up front, the fewer problems later on. A custom home project is not necessarily for the faint of heart, but it can end up being one of life's most rewarding experiences.