

Designing Flow

Floor plans should reflect both functionality and lifestyle

text by CHERYL ROSE

An aesthetically beautiful house is easy to admire, but how does it function? Homeowners can quickly tell you what they have learned about floor plans the hard way: hauling laundry up and down stairs, trying to make meals with minimal counter space, insufficient storage, everyone crammed in the kitchen at social gatherings. If the opportunity arises to choose a floor plan, remodel an existing one or even design one from scratch, there are a number of considerations, starting with the size, shape and position of the lot and moving on to flow, function and lifestyle.

Finding the right fit

Nina Rivers, an interior designer with Architectural Alliance in Beaumont, said most clients come in with a wish list of wants and clear opinions on what they don't want in a home design. She encourages clients to bring in pictures of actual homes or from magazines or other sources that they feel reflect their style or goals. After getting a sense of the preferred style, Rivers encourages clients to think about how they live and function in a home. Do they like to cook? How often do they entertain? Is someone a baker or a gardener? Do they work at home or have a favorite hobby?

The goal is to find an appealing style that fits the budget and lifestyle priorities of the client. Architects and interior designers can help clients make good decisions by offering adaptations, suggestions and focus. "Part of our process is to recognize how people use their living spaces and to determine what elements need to be in there," Rivers said.

Remodeling for lifestyle

Karen Dailey and Jorge Hernandez purchased an older home in Beaumont a few years ago. They loved the neighborhood and the charm of the house. How-

ever, once they started a family and had two young children, they realized the home wasn't functioning for them as well as it could. "We knew the kind of remodeling we wanted to do was going to cost nearly as much as we paid for the house, so we did some soul searching," Dailey said. "We debated if we should build from scratch or move somewhere else. But we had lived in our home two years and we knew this is where we wanted to live. We love the neighborhood and it's close to school, work and activities. We decided we wanted to maximize the potential of the property so it would better fit the lifestyle we wanted to have."

Their wish list was concentrated on function more than appearance, because they appreciated their home and wanted to stay true to the spirit of the original design. Their areas of focus were the kitchen, which they wanted to enlarge, and the outdoor space and garage/guest house, which they didn't know what to do with but knew was taking up lot space and not providing any benefit. They hired Architectural Alliance and worked with Rob Clark, an architect, and Rivers to think through the options and make a plan. From those meetings, several ideas emerged that Dailey and Hernandez hadn't considered.

"Through the process of visualizing, we realized that if we demolished the old guest house and relocated an addition to the front part of the lot, it would open up a huge green space and give us more privacy," Dailey said. "We put in a great functional garage with a modern apartment upstairs and we added an outdoor kitchen. To expand the kitchen in the house, we knocked down a porte-cochère we weren't using and pushed out the wall. That gave us room to add an island and additional cabinets. One recommendation the architects gave us was to shift a doorway to align with our family room so it doesn't feel so chopped."

The remodeling was a significant project that took about 13 months to complete. "It has completely transformed how we are able to entertain," Dailey said. "Now we have the perfect party place for kids and adults year-round. We love the flow between inside and outside living and I love the functionality of the kitchen. We are thrilled with the changes." **VIP**



photography by SCOTT ESLINGER



Considerations in designing or choosing a floor plan:

- What is suitable to the size and shape of the lot?
- What is compatible with zoning or neighborhood covenants?
- What is the budget?
- How many occupants will there be and what are their ages?
- Will the home be too small or too large within a few years?
- What design style appeals: traditional, transitional, contemporary? Formal or casual? Multiple paint colors in separate rooms or an overall theme color? Different styles of furnishings in separate areas or a more blended, open space? Cozy or spacious?
- Do you want the master bedroom near or far from other bedrooms?
- Where is the most functional location for the laundry room?
- Will you use a guest room for visitors?
- Do you require a home office, home gym, hobby room or other specialty room?
- Will your current furniture fit?
- Is there sufficient wall space in living areas for a mounted television, piece of art or other large furniture?
- Does the design take advantage of views and/or natural light?
- Does the design provide adequate privacy from neighbors or the street?
- How many garage bays do you need for vehicle storage? Do you need additional space for workshops, gardening supplies, freezers or general storage?
- How do you entertain? Do you need a large dining area or outdoor living space? Do you eat in the kitchen or at dining table?
- Do you need a utility room, mud room or entry foyer to provide a drop-zone for items such as shoes, packs, mail, tools?
- Do you want outdoor living options such as porches, decks, patios, pools, kitchens or cabanas?
- How much space do you need in the kitchen? Will you have extra or specialty appliances? Do you need a preparation area or seated space at a bar?
- What kind of storage options do you need? Pantries, closets, built-in shelves, cupboards or cabinetry?
- Do you want a tub and a shower, a combined tub/shower or just a larger shower?
- How will your choices affect the length of time the home is suitable for you?
- How will your choices affect re-sale appeal?