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PLANNING YOUR NEW HOME

A home carefully designed around the needs of the people who will live in it and one that responds to its setting will be more satisfying, economical, and efficient. Creative use of the spaces and being able to define your real needs and priorities of daily living are the keys to successful planning.

There are three basic approaches for designing and construction of single-family homes:

HOMES DESIGNED AND BUILT TO SELL IN THE SPECULATIVE OR TRACT MARKET:

These "For Sale" houses include very generic amenities and construction techniques that will hopefully be suitable to most potential occupants. Speculative design and construction is purely trend, fashion and finance driven. These homes are nothing more than a "marketable commodity" built to satisfy the banks', builders' and real estate brokers' bottom lines. They are built to appeal to the widest market possible; with re-sale potential being the main idea. Most mainstream homes are constructed in such a way that they will have very high maintenance and utility expenses as a result of little or no thought given to energy efficiency and durability. The quality of materials, methods and equipment used in most speculative homes is such that it is doubtful that they will last beyond their 30-year mortgage without requiring major, expensive renovations. A common situation in this area is how most builders deal with a westerly view. The solution most widely used is to install a large number of cheap windows and put in more A/C tonnage to compensate for the added heat load, instead of carefully orienting the building and designing built-in shading capabilities while still capturing the desired view.

"CUSTOMIZED" HOMES:

These homes are designed according to a client's pre-conceived set of ideas regarding style, arrangement, etc., purchasing a "stock plan" or by re-drawing an existing plan with modifications to fit a new building site. The client consults the architect or designer for lot selection, site design and use, and works with the client to "tie" these ideas into a workable plan. While these homes are usually of somewhat higher quality than speculative homes (depending on budget), little thought is usually given to how the house relates to its site. These homes usually are in stark contrast to their surroundings and can be just as intrusive as speculative homes. If energy use issues or techniques are considered they are usually in the form of "band aid" solutions. An example would be solar screens applied to the exterior of the windows rather than careful placement and shading of higher quality windows. Also, style clash with the region is rampant. Notice the red brick, center hall colonial style with green shutters built all over the country. Appropriate for Connecticut, but not the Texas Hill Country.

SITE-SPECIFIC, SUSTAINABLE HOMES.

"Sustainability" means many things. It means meeting our present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. It also means employing design, construction methods, equipment choices and system integration that do not require vast amounts of energy, time and financial resources to maintain or restore to their original condition after they deteriorate. It is common to look at one part of a home without considering its relationship to the other parts. Every major part of a building has some influence on every other part. Application of sustainable principles to real-world building projects requires a combination of skill, logic and experience. There are homes that are truly "Custom Designed" for one family's particular needs and lifestyles while still maintaining an appeal to a potential re-sale buyer. These homes will be designed for a specific building site and its microclimate. This method of design presents a special challenge to both the client and designer. Many times it means dismissing pre-conceived "house" images for a fresh, bold design approach. As a result, homes designed by this method resist being "pigeon holed" into any particular style. Other site-specific designs maintain a more mainstream style while being functionally more efficient than other homes. The direction taken depends on the values of the client. Design problems solved by this method are not difficult. It takes foresight on the client's part; faith and trust in their architect or designer's capabilities and willingness to take the time necessary plan properly. In fact, it is often easier to design by this method. This is the method I work best with and recommend, as it results in the best solution for the program's requirements and the most satisfaction for all involved. There are four key elements that dramatically control the final design of a home and each of these elements individually affects the other:

- A) Construction budget.
- B) The building site's characteristics.
- C) Quantity of space desired.
- D) Quality of materials desired.
- E) Type of alternative construction methods, equipment and systems desired.

To achieve a successful solution to any design situation, the architect or designer MUST have direct control of at least two of these elements.

The first step in beginning the design process involves an overview of the entire situation. There are several major factors that work to inspire a design:

1. THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT:

The major assets of the site the designer must consider: size, shape, natural setting, grade topography, tree locations, direction of views, prevailing breezes and solar orientation. We will include into this a structure that blends well with and is considerate of the natural beauty of the site, while taking advantage of the site's natural attributes as much as possible.

2. THE PROGRAM:

Otherwise defined as the needs and wishes of the people who will be living in the home. This is where the client can address and define their ideas about this new home. This list should contain all your needs and ideas with your basic concern being the people who will occupy this home. Describe their activities both individually and together. The more thought you put into this phase of the "seeing" process - the more successful the result will be. I have found photographs from magazines or pictures you have taken yourself that clearly show an idea or concept can be helpful in the design process. The construction budget must also be carefully considered.

3. INTEGRATION OF ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES:

There are many methods of durable, low maintenance, efficient construction and energy conserving techniques available for consideration. The challenge is to choose which are appropriate for the individual client, project and budget. Any design and construction technique or equipment choice beyond what is considered "normal or accepted" in mainstream home construction always costs more in the beginning. However, the higher quality choice will almost always pay for itself in the long term, in increased comfort levels and minimized operating expenses over the life of the building. Therefore, flexibility is very important as compromises will be a major part of the planning process. There is an old saying: "Never be afraid to buy the best. You will always be happy with it."

4. DESIGN AND PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:

We will consider the following issues during the design of your new home:

- Configuration of the rooms in relation to the Program and the site's natural characteristics. Proper siting and organization of the structure(s) in relation to each other and the site's microclimate.
- Protection, shading and natural ventilation of the structure.
- Durable, low to zero maintenance material use inside and outside.
- Available construction budget.
- Energy use mitigation.

If the client is interested, we will also consider the following:

- Alternatives to standard wood frame construction.
- Possible use of salvaged materials.
- Alternative or supplemental power systems.
- Alternative cooling and heating systems.
- Rain harvesting systems for all or part of the water supply.
- Waste water-recycling systems.

I believe that one's home is a special place. A home designed for you will be well worth the extra effort of creating it from a clean sheet of paper. Building a home is the largest single investment most people will make. This is why it is so important to challenge your pre-conceived ideas about what a home is and how it should function.

My concern for these important issues separates my services from the "plan factory" type design firms. These types of firms usually only "draw up a set of plans" and are only concerned with finishing your blueprints as quickly as possible. They are more interested in making money rather than the quality and long - term performance of your home. While there is a large market for this type of operation, I do not agree with their approach. You can trust that I will not lower my standards to their level. Therefore, I do not create a large volume of designs per year. This assures attention to detail and work of the highest quality.

It is my goal to create homes for my clients that are not only aesthetically pleasing and livable, but one that is durable; energy efficient, has low maintenance requirements and is environmentally sensitive. Organic, sustainable design and construction enhance one's well being by creating a comfortable, healthy living environment. Your home should work for you. You should not have to continually work for your home. Please feel free to contact me about your dreams and ideas. I pride myself in being able to listen to and capture your thoughts, turning them into reality. My past clients have not only enjoyed the process, but they are happy in their space, my greatest reward.

Thank you for considering my services.

Matt Bachardy, A.I.A. Associate