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Analyzing the Interior Spaces in Your Home

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Analyzing the Interior Space in Your Home

Prior to making any decisions, whether you are considering building a new home, buying a different home, or simply thinking about a little remodeling of where you presently live, you must analyze your shelter needs.

This is especially important for several reasons. The home you now have may not “fit” your needs today. Your life style, interests, hobbies, habits, and activities are constantly expanding and shifting. New influences are always modifying your decisions. Over time the number and ages of those who live at home change. Children do grow up and their spatial needs change. And, your home is probably the most expensive single item you will ever buy. Your home should function efficiently for you.

There are two basic considerations when analyzing the interior spaces of your home. These are *functional* and *aesthetic*. Both are intertwined and difficult to separate, however, it is far better to first analyze your home from a functional point of view since it is how you USE it that is most important. Your aesthetic needs and desires can usually be adjusted to fit your functional requirements far easier than the reverse.

While there are unlimited variations in floor plans, they can be divided into two types: *closed plans* and *open plans*. Simply defined, a closed plan is one in which the space for a specific activity is normally enclosed by solid walls, i.e., living room, bedroom, bathroom, etc. An open plan does not have solid walls enclosing an activity area; the living space, dining area, etc., are often combined.

Frequently, we find homes built with a combination of these plans. There is a tendency for the open type plan to be used in the more public areas such as where you entertain guests, join in family activities, etc., while a closed plan is used when more private activities are performed—sleeping, bathing, studying.

Regardless of the kind of structure, location, size, or plan, to evaluate any dwelling—house or apartment—it is necessary to judge it against user requirements. The home user is not just a consumer but a *participant* in this environment, as in all environments. Only when a house or interior space “fits” a person or family, that is, when it effectively protects, warms, and cools their bodies and possessions, functions efficiently for their uses, and satisfies their aesthetic wants, can that home be considered successful or even adequate.

The following functional and spatial divisions should be carefully considered when evaluating a home relative to the needs of those who live or shall live there.

Home Users Defined

Each home will have different user needs, of course, and these are often determined by the number and ages of occupants.

QUESTIONS:

- How many use the home? Their ages?
- Will any changes in the number of persons in the family occur within a year? two years? five years?
- How many pets live in the house?
- What are they? Are they well-mannered?
- Truthfully, do you consider yourself or a family member(s) “hard” on a house and its furnishings?

Interior Spaces Defined

Entrance

When and how one enters a dwelling is very important. The transition from the exterior to interior is accomplished here and beginning traffic patterns are immediately established.

QUESTIONS:

- Is it easy to distinguish the “front” entrance to the dwelling?
- What entrance will you use most?
- What do you have to carry in or out through this entrance? How far is it from where you park the car?
- Do other family members also use this entrance primarily? Their needs.
- Where do guests enter?
- Is this the same entrance as the one used by the family? Another? Why?
- Is there adequate coat and equipment storage near the entrance(s)?
- Is there adequate space to greet and say farewell to guests near the entrance(s)?
- Does there need to be a “mud room” or bathroom near an entrance?
- Does the entrance reflect or suggest to a visitor the character and quality of the family’s life style?
- Are the entrances well lighted on the exterior and interior?
- Are the floor coverings functional for the type of foot traffic?
- Do you need a pet entrance? child entrance? spouse entrance?

Living—Social

Upon entering a dwelling, the spaces for entertainment and relaxation are usually first encountered and are usually the largest in the house and the most richly furnished. While the term *entertain* usually implies that more than one person is involved and there is more activity than where one *relaxes*, frequently both activities occur in the same spaces.

QUESTIONS:

- How do you entertain? How often do you entertain?
- Is there variety in how you entertain (cocktail parties for 100, coffee for two, club meetings for 20, bridge for four couples)?
- Do you entertain guests in more than one area of the home? Where? Where do you relax? Do you relax with anyone else?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- Do your hobbies involve equipment and supplies that need to be stored or can they be left out?
- Do others (teenagers, children, or parents) entertain? If they do, are all members of the family included?
- Consequently, do you need a space to entertain and a space to relax at the same time?

Cooking and Eating

The spaces where members of the household cook and eat are more varied today than they were in the past. Just as methods of cooking and types of food have changed, so have the places in which it is cooked.

QUESTIONS:

- What kinds of meals do you eat at home? How frequently?
- How many eat together at a meal?

Breakfast? everyday? Lunch? everyday? Dinner? everyday?
Are your meals made from "scratch," or are they largely pre-prepared?

Does your entertaining involve much food preparation and eating?

Where do you eat your meals?

In the kitchen? how often? family room? dining room? living room? bedroom?

Outside, but still on your property?

Do you cook any place other than in the "kitchen?"

In the family room? dining room? living room? bedroom?

Do you have a barbeque area outside? How frequently is it used? Can you get to it easily from where the food is stored?

Do you need much space for the storage of food? appliances and food serving equipment?

Do you do any food preservation? How much?

Freezing? Canning? Drying?

How much garbage accumulates during the preparation, cooking, and consuming of meals?

Outdoor

One of the most remarkable phenomena of the twentieth-century culture is the desire to be outdoors. Undoubtedly the reason is that for centuries man has struggled to provide more adequate shelter and methods of food preparation, yet he has still retained his enjoyment of "fresh air and sunshine." It is, therefore, important to consider the outdoor activities of a family when evaluating a dwelling.

QUESTIONS:

Is your home air conditioned? central or window units?

Can you open your windows and doors on nice days? do you?

Do you enjoy sports and other outdoor activities?

Do you enjoy cooking outside? eating outside? working outside?

Do any of your outdoor activities require storage spaces for equipment or supplies? seasonally or all year?

How many automobiles does your family have? bicycles? snowmobiles? Do you have any outdoor pets?

Sleeping

Sleeping space requirements change over time, and where you sleep is usually one of the more private spaces in your home. Not only is privacy required, but freedom from excessive noise is desired.

QUESTIONS:

What is needed in the space allotted for sleeping?

Does it hold a bed (or beds) and little else?

Is the bed the dominant piece of furniture or is it almost visually nonexistent?

How large does this space have to be?

Does it have to be physically isolated from the rest of the house?

Are there activities other than sleeping performed in this space?

Do all members of the household sleep at the same time?

How many people must have sleeping facilities and must they be grouped together?

What are the ages, sex, and relationships within the household?

Bathing and Laundering

Perhaps the most private areas in a house are those given to bathing and other personal grooming needs. The inclusion of a specific space within a home for a bath is a relatively recent addition to the plan. While a bathroom is one the most expensive rooms for its size, a tendency in recent years has been to develop large and elaborate bathrooms. Again, it is a question of what activities are to be done there, when, and by whom.

QUESTIONS:

Do you prefer to take a tub bath or a shower? how often?
What about the preferences of other members of the household?

Is there a bathroom traffic problem currently? Do you see one in the future?

How many complete bathrooms would you like?

Would all of them require the three major pieces of equipment: bathtub, stool or toilet, sink or lavatory?

If some or all of the bedrooms had a sink or lavatory, would the bathroom use problem be lessened or alleviated?

What if the bathroom were compartmentalized? That is, the three main pieces of equipment in separate spaces with separate entrances?

Can the bathroom and kitchen plumbing be clustered to reduce costs?

Would a "mud room" or bathroom by the back door help?

Are there any specialized bathroom requirements because of a handicap in the family?

Storage

The problem of storage has become acute in recent years. Houses are being built increasingly smaller and space is often at a premium, yet in today's society accumulating objects is not difficult. Where does one store his "needs"? (Some architects and designers believe that approximately 25 percent of a house should or must be devoted to storage).

QUESTIONS:

Are you a collector? Are other members of the family collectors?

What are the general sizes of what you collect? large? medium? small? tiny?

What types of objects need to be stored? For how long? Always in the same spaces?

Where would be their most convenient location?

Do you prefer walk-in closets or storage walls?

Would you like an attic, basement, warehouse?

Do your hobbies and sports activities require considerable equipment? are they seasonal?

Space-Function Relationships

Since personal privacy, the control of unwanted noise, and the channeling of human traffic are vital considerations in the planning of the interior, the establishment of effective traffic patterns is of primary concern. The effectiveness of a proposed floorplan or an actual structure can be tested by trying to figure out how well one can travel through it. Imagine living and carrying on daily activities within the confining patterns of the plan. For example, try to figure out how a meal could be cooked and served. Is the cooking area convenient to the eating area? Is it possible to go from the kitchen to the eating area without going through a third space that is used for a conflicting activity? While cooking, will a steady flow of traffic

through the kitchen be disturbing?

Determine how easily one could enter carrying bags of heavy groceries, or taking out the garbage. Is the kitchen conveniently located near a door that serves the parking area? Or, is it necessary to walk through the main entrance hall, living room, dining room, or den to reach the kitchen? If someone is entertaining in the living area, is it possible to move from each bedroom to the kitchen for a snack without entering the living area?

The most common way of channeling the flow of human traffic between spaces is through halls. Strategically located, a well-placed hallway allows freedom of personal movement without seriously disturbing activities in other spaces, and it often forms the axis or backbone of the traffic flow for the entire dwelling. However, because of poor planning, many houses have too much space devoted to halls, and the occupants of these dwellings frequently feel as if they are living in a maze of narrow spaces pierced by doors.

Finally, there is a caveat which every home owner should remember. *"Is it more important to me to make my home exactly as I want it than to be able to get my money back easily if I were to sell it?"* Quite possibly at the present time you are not considering selling your home—but almost without exception, every home is sold eventually.

In today's world, your home is about the only place where you can create surroundings that are "you." Even so, there may still be constraints—the desires and needs of other mem-

bers of the household, financial limitations, zoning and building code regulations, etc.,—but, you *should* try to make your home more functional and fit the requirements of those living there. Your lives will undoubtedly be more pleasant and rewarding.

However, experience has proven that the more a home is individualized and unique, the more limited the number of potential buyers. It is better to resist the faddish and extremes in decoration. It is also to the owners' advantage to resist building into the structure such furniture as dressers, buffets, benches, or couches; these frequently limit the buyers to those having little furniture. The "built-in" look can often be achieved without actually attaching the pieces, consequently they can be removed, if necessary, and allow for more flexible furniture and equipment arrangements. (And, not to be overlooked, the seller is not without this furniture when he moves from the house.)

The home owner, therefore, must carefully evaluate the benefits of living in a home that "fits" the occupants' functional and aesthetic needs against the potential of an easy and quick sale. It has repeatedly been shown that where the "dollar" governs all decisions, dissatisfaction frequently thrives. And it is a heartening fact, that even the most distinctive homes do sell, eventually, and to buyers who have the same or nearly the same requirements and aesthetic levels as the original owners.

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