





Substance over size ...

Choosing a home's layout

Smaller houses and open floor plans with great rooms gain popularity

BY EMILY BRANDLER
OF THE JOURNAL OF BUSINESS

When determining the conceptual design for their homes, buyers of executive-level homes here increasingly are choosing substance over size, and asking for open floor plans that give a more spacious feel to smaller quarters.

In addition to size, such home owners also are asking in their designs for master bathrooms with walk-in showers, multiple office areas, great rooms, and covered decks so they can spend more time outdoors while still enjoying plenty of creature comforts, builders and designers say. In addition, they're picking designs that feature great stairs, such as ranchers with daylight basements.

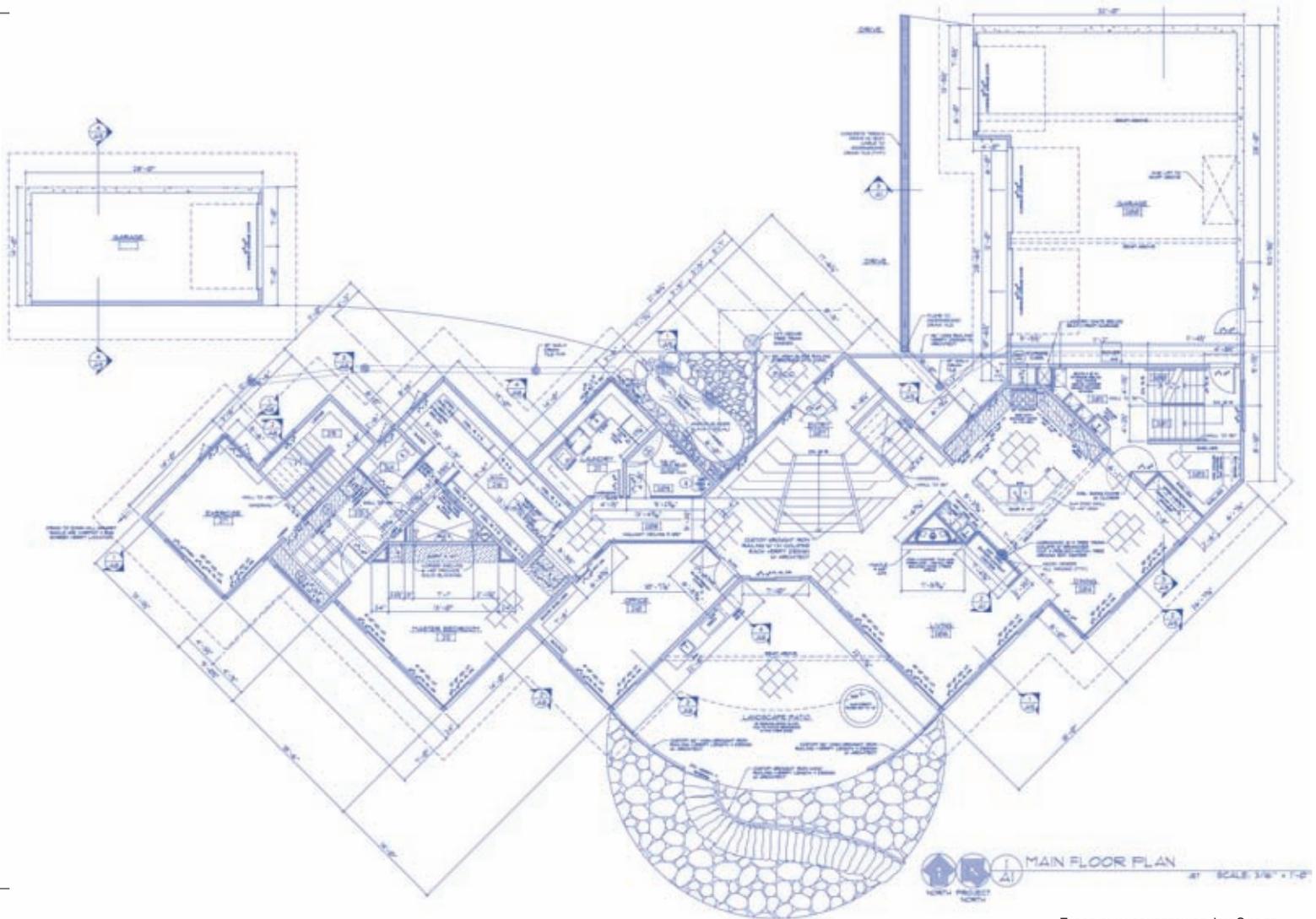
"A while back, homes were increasing in size—what we called McMansions," says Todd Sullivan, president of Spokane Valley-based Sullivan Homes Inc. "Now, we're seeing what we call jewel-box homes, which are smaller and much more focused on the intricate details."

Many of the houses Sullivan Homes now builds have about 2,600 square feet of space on the main floor and about 2,200 square feet of space on the lower level, yet still include five or six bedrooms, Sullivan says.

Spokane-area architect-builder Gerry Copeland, of Copeland Architecture & Construction Inc., says that while 6,000-square-foot houses used to be fairly typical, he's now regularly designing 3,000-square-foot homes for clients. Driving that decision is a client's desire for a home that's easier and less expensive to maintain and so they can spend money on other pursuits, such as travel, he says.

Spokane-area architect-builder Jon Sayler, who designed this home, located in Sandpoint, Idaho, says great rooms, which combine the kitchen, living room, and dining room in one open area, are widely popular in homes here.

—PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER CHAFFEE



—FLOOR PLAN COURTESY OF JON SAYLER

This floor plan of a Dover, Idaho, home designed by Jon Sayler shows a great room, master suite, and office on the main level, which architects and builders say is becoming increasingly popular among clients who build their homes with the intent of retiring in them.

Yet at the same time, since home owners are spending less on the size of their home, they're pouring more money into upgrading the finishes of their houses, such as by using granite and tile for countertop surfaces instead of laminate or Corian, he says.

"Downsizing is now considered, I think, cool, whereas it wasn't five or 10 years ago," Copeland says. "People find that the big house just isn't necessary; it's driven from convenience, not cost."

The great room, which tends to save space, perhaps is the most widely popular feature in floor plans of upscale homes, Copeland says. In a great room layout, the kitchen, living room, and dining room are combined in one open area, rather than separated into different rooms.

Longtime Spokane-area architect and builder Jon Sayler says that since great rooms don't have walls to define each space, he incorporates differences in the designs of ceilings, floors, or windows to help separate spaces in a great room visually.

"Most of the houses, in any price bracket now, are houses with an open great room," Sayler says. "Formal dining and formal living rooms are history."

Since kitchens in a great room are more open and have fewer walls, they also have less space for upper cabinetry, Sayler says. As a result, he's seeing a "return of the pantry." Copeland says big pantries are very popular with his clients, as well.

In terms of master bedrooms and bathrooms, home owners still want ample space and big windows to highlight views, but are devoting less space to those rooms than they did a decade ago, Copeland says. In bathrooms, homeowners now want luxurious walk-in showers, instead of, or perhaps in addition to, whirlpool tubs, he says.

"The walk-in shower is very popular, and most people want it even at the expense of other things, like interior quality or some square footage," Sayler says. "People are saying, 'Yeah, we want to do this so take something else out,' which has been a surprise to me many

times."

In addition, Sayler says separate "his" and "hers" bathrooms—a trend in master bathrooms he saw when he was working in the Palm Desert in Southern California, several decades ago—now is making its way here.

Sayler says he frequently designs master bedrooms and bathrooms with a second door in a walk-in closet that leads to the rest of the house. In such a layout, a person can wake up in the morning and use the bathroom to get ready, enter a walk-in closet to get dressed, then exit the walk-in closet through another door so they don't have to re-enter the bedroom and disturb their sleeping partner, he says.

"I did that design a lot for doctors in the 1980s, but now we see lots of people who want it, because it's very practical," Sayler says.

Todd Stam, of Coeur d'Alene-based Aspen Homes & Development LLC, says that in terms of the location of the master bedroom and bathroom, most of the floor plans his company designs

place the master bed and bath on one side of the main level and a couple of other suites on the other side of the main level, rather than clustering them together, to increase privacy and reduce noise.

Sullivan Homes has been building a large number of homes with master bedrooms, great rooms, a large study room, and secondary suites on the main floor, Sullivan says. In such homes, an open staircase well leads to a lower level that includes a family room, bar, home theater, and two or three bedrooms with their own bathrooms, he says.

Home theaters

Home theaters and wine cellars are among the most frequently requested specialty rooms, says Dave Largent, of Spokane-based Dave Largent Homes Inc. In addition, mud rooms and expanded laundry rooms are rising in popularity, he says.

Copeland also says that a theater room, while still fairly rare, is the specialty room that's in highest demand, and adds that he receives more requests now for media rooms than for recreation rooms.

Sayler says wine cellars and home theaters are popular features in new



Copeland Architecture & Construction Inc. designed this home, which overlooks Lake Coeur d'Alene, to include the great room pictured here. Architects and builders here say great rooms give a more spacious feel to the smaller houses that home owners are requesting more often.

—PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

homes here, but asserts that client demand for home theaters, which spiked at the start of this decade, is starting to decline. Instead, rising numbers of home owners want large closets to store portable entertainment equipment in the great room or media décor features that hide devices when they're not being used, he says.

"In the late '70s, people built new

homes for a new kitchen, then in the 1980s it was to get a new master bed and bath, then in the 1990s it was for a decent closet," Sayler says. "Now, it's technology."

As evidence of the growing effort to incorporate home owners' technology requirements in home designs, computer rooms are becoming a standard feature in upscale houses, he says. One

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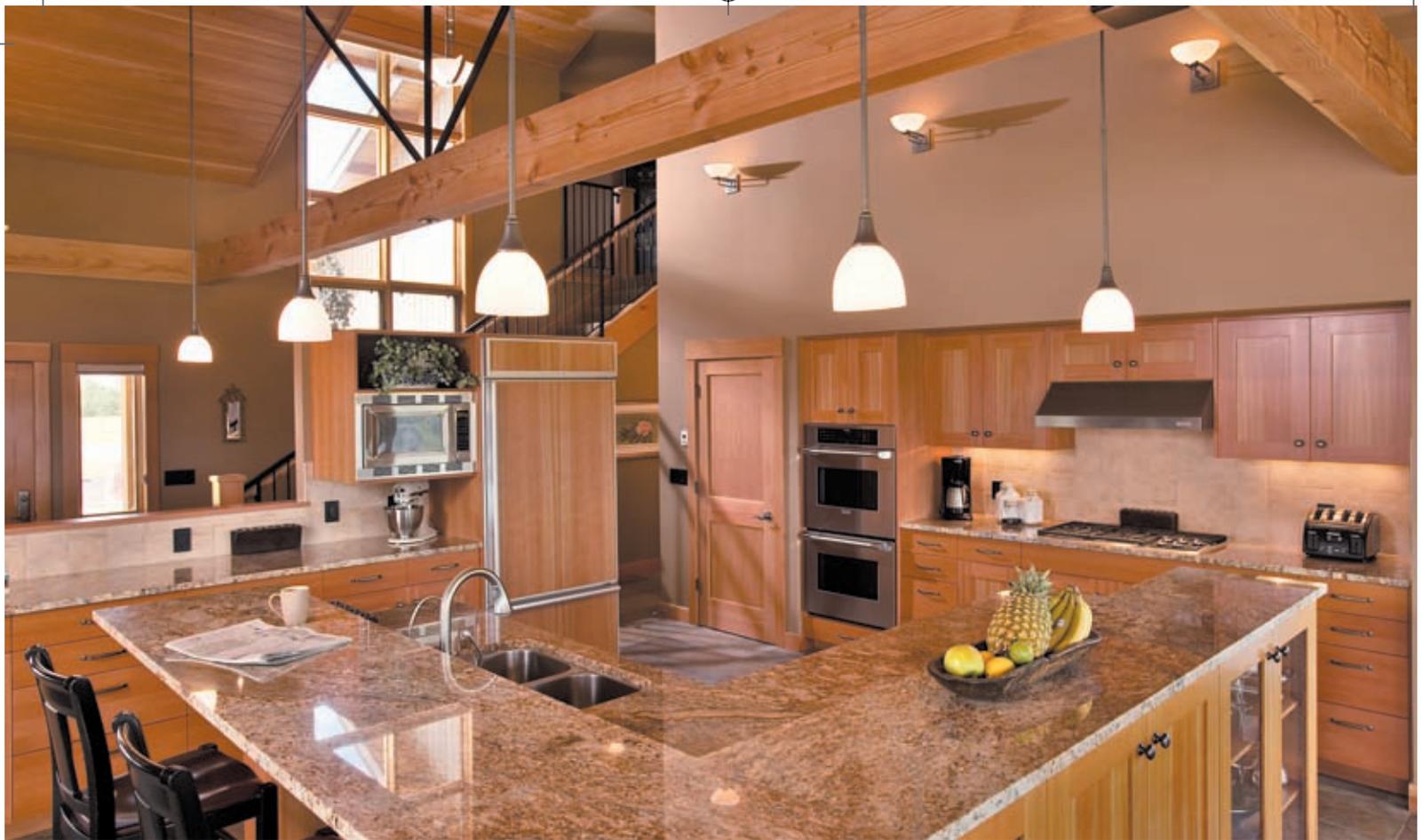
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Dave Largent Homes



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The kitchen in this Spangle, Wash., home, designed by Copeland Architecture & Construction, displays a trend toward kitchens that have fewer walls, which means less space for upper cabinetry. As a result, demand for pantries is rising.

popular space that Sayler has been adding to his home designs in recent years is what he calls a computer nook, which is a small room, typically near the kitchen, with glass doors and desks built into the walls on up to three sides. Parents can duck into the room to get privacy during a phone call, and children can use the computer workstations to do homework within sight of their parents.

Largent says he's starting to build more secondary offices in the basements of homes for older children to use. A small alcove near a bedroom downstairs also is a popular way to provide work spaces for kids, he says.

Stam says he's seeing rising demand for more office spaces in general, whether it's separate offices for a couple who both work at home or a small desk setup in the kitchen next to the mud room. Occasionally, a client requests a den-office combination room. Stam says he doesn't build any true dens anymore.

Outdoor living

Increasingly, home owners are asking for covered rear patios with built in barbecues and fireplaces, Stam says. Those clients often come from warmer climates and are accustomed to spending time outdoors, even during the win-

ter, so they want more outdoor living space, he says.

Largent says his clients frequently ask him to build an outdoor kitchen with amenities such as a refrigerator. Typically, Largent tries to integrate the surrounding landscape into the designs of those covered decks, as a way to tie the architecture of the home and its environment together.

The terrain of a housing lot affects the layout of a house significantly, Sayler says. For instance, the price of lake property is rising, so lake lots are becoming fairly small, he says. As a result of those smaller lots, as well as home owners' desires to maximize their views, the homes built on those lots typically have multiple levels.

"The big trick is getting those views into the house in a reasonable amount of space," he says.

At the same time, Sayler typically designs those homes with as few stairs as possible, especially since many of his clients want their homes built in a way that allows them to stay there as long they can as they age.

"They're called feet-first houses, because you go out of the house feet first on the gurney," he quips.

Stam says most of his clients build their homes with the intent of retiring in them, so ranchers with daylight base-

ments are a common floor-plan choice because the main level contains all of the spaces the homeowner needs, while the basement has enough room to accommodate kids and grandkids. In addition, many of the lots on which Aspen builds homes are located on steep hillsides, so daylight basements make the most sense, he says.

Largent says ranchers with daylight basements are also a popular floor-plan choice with his clients. He builds a large number of houses on city lots, which are smaller than they were in the past, and that style of home is an efficient use of the reduced space, he says.

Sullivan Homes builds quite a few homes in luxury golf or marina communities, so it has to keep that upscale environment in mind when designing its homes, Sullivan says. The company works with land planners and landscape architects to create floor plans that are cohesive with the homes' surroundings.

"We're trying to work with the topography and the view corridors; there really is an art to laying out these properties," he says. "You no longer put down the street and try to crank out the lots."

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