

My Search for the Perfect House Plan

3 traps you MUST avoid!

Everyone's home-building dream is driven by the hope they can find one, perfect house plan. To fuel that fire, there are tens of thousands of home plans of all types and sizes everywhere you look: on the web, in plan books, at libraries, in magazines, nearly everywhere. It can consume so much of your time and energy! You're so tired, even if you came across the right house plan, you wouldn't recognize it if it bit you!

Not too long ago I was displaying at a Home Show. I noticed a couple looking at building materials and house plans on my display table. The woman was very intent. "Are you thinking of building a home?" I asked. This generated unexpected laughter. "As soon as we find the perfect house plan, we'll be ready," she again laughed. "We have been looking for six years!"

Six years! When I asked them just what they were looking for, guess what! They really couldn't tell me. They assumed that when they saw the perfect plan, they would just know! Are you in the "waiting for perfection to fall into your lap" trap?

It's even worse if you purchase plans before you've decided upon what you really want and determined the cost to build. You don't want to fall into this trap either! Here, in no particular order, are the three most common traps and their remedies.

TRAP #1: Leaping before you look. This is rather common, believe it or not. Sometimes the search just wears on you and you cave. Truthfully, it boils down to "leaping before you look *properly!*" It may seem like there's been a lot of looking but not much progress. Either the design isn't really what you wanted or the building cost doesn't fit your budget. Either way, it's bad news.

TRAP #2: The scattergun approach. Probably the most common mistake and time-waster is the notion that if you see every home plan under the sun, you'll somehow find the perfect one for you. It doesn't happen this way. There is no way to actually see **every** plan and secondly, looking is a tiresome process. If you do see the perfect plan, you might not recognize it. Tired eyes and spent emotions don't perform well together.

TRAP #3: He'll like whatever new home plan I pick out". Uh oh! This one is "fun!" When one spouse does all the researching and deciding, usually there will be fireworks at some point down the line. This approach is going to end with either a fight or with a halt to the whole process. If somehow the process keeps going without a proper resolution, the battles end up recurring throughout the building process.

SOLUTIONS: Now for the good news! The solution is quite easy. Luckily, the solution is pretty much the same for all three traps. Take the time to do it right and you'll be right on track to finding your perfect house plan. Here is your simple 3-step solution:

- 1) **“Communicate and Cooperate”**: This one is not always easy when personal taste and emotions are involved but you can’t ignore this requirement. First, determine your own individual tastes, wants and needs. Then, each of you should prioritize the list based on what’s most important to you. Allow each other to protect at least one item that cannot be eliminated but CAN be open to compromise. Combine the lists and talk, talk, talk!
- 2) **“Narrow your Search”**: Simply put, you can’t see every home design. Once your lists are merged and your wants and needs are known, you can significantly narrow your search parameters on the house plan search engines. You’re going to be far happier and more successful when you limit the square footage, the type or style of home, the number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms, etc.
- 3) **“Estimate the Cost to Build”**: Once you have picked a plan you both like (subject to the few compromises,) you should then interview a couple of builders you might want to use to help you build. Part of the interviewing process involves estimates about the cost per square foot of building the home you have chosen. (Builders can do this using the house plan you’ve chosen.) It won’t be perfect, but it’ll be close; especially if you’ve given the contractor information concerning your finishing materials and the level of quality you seek.

Fortunately I was able to help the couple mentioned above. We followed the solution process and they quickly came to a conclusion and chose a house plan. From their plan, they made a few minor changes and had their dream home designed. The beauty is in the simplicity. All they needed was a third party to encourage them to cooperate and focus.

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