

DESIGN your home

James Ray Spahn photo

When designing your log home, take the time to create a plan that's just right for your lifestyle.

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Master Plan

Design your home right with these 6 expert tips.

Everyone knows your home's floor plan should reflect your lifestyle. But how do you match that vague notion with a set of blueprints? It's actually pretty easy. First, outline the specifics, such as how you live and who will live with you on a day-to-day basis. Next, think about what you absolutely have to have, what you definitely don't want and what you can live without. Answering these questions will get you started on the home that's just right for you.

1. FIND A DESIGNER. First, determine whether you should hire an independent architect or work with a designer from your log home company. Before deciding, meet with each of your potential candidates. Remember: You'll be working closely with your designer for quite some time, so make sure you feel comfortable sharing ideas and talking with him or her openly.

Once you've made your choice, you should meet face to face several times throughout the design process. When you get together, don't be afraid to voice your ideas, even if they seem far-fetched. A good designer is also a good listener who strives to incorporate as many of your requests into the plan as possible while being honest about how your wants and needs stack up against your budget.

2. TAKE MONEY MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS. Be prepared for your architect or

designer to ask you outright about your budget. It's important to share accurate information about how much you're willing and able to spend. Ask yourself the tough questions: What can I afford? What can we put off until later? What can I do without?

Though it may be tempting to design your dream home first and then cut amenities out until you've reached a price you can afford, this practice can quickly become an exercise in frustration and disappointment. Not to mention, it can wind up costing you more in unnecessary design fees. There are plenty of tricks for stretching the mighty dollar during the initial design process. Your home's size, coupled with wise construction-material choices, for example, can help.

According to Rob Wrightman of True North Log Homes in Ontario, Canada, the most common log home footprint is 24 by 36 feet. "If you plan a home that's 24 by 34 feet, thinking that shaving the extra two feet will save you money, you'd be mistaken," says Rob. "Wood is sold in certain dimensions, so you'd be paying for excess logs that will go to waste. You might as well add the extra elbowroom."

Clever use of materials also allows for more wishing and less spending. For example, if you can't afford a four-sided stone hearth, consider incorporating stone just around the fireplace opening. By hiding the chimney and moving the hearth to a wall, you'll eliminate three stone walls. The savings? About \$20,000.

3. BACK TO THE FUTURE.

To find the plan that fits your life, you must first define what your future needs might be. If you're a family of five with children from tots to teens, then room size, traffic flow and privacy issues must be addressed. If you're a master chef (or at least you like to think so), consider bumping up your kitchen's amenities. If you're on the brink of retirement, a main-level master suite might keep you in your home for the long term.

To establish how much square footage you'll need, log home designer Murray Arnott, suggests adding up the ideal floor area of each room in your new home. Then add an additional 25 percent for wall thickness, circulation, stairs and so on. To preserve precious space in a small home, reduce the number of hallways and include plenty of built-in storage and shelving. (For more on determining how much space you'll need, see "Room-by-Room Rundown" on page 20.)

4. THE SKY'S THE LIMIT.

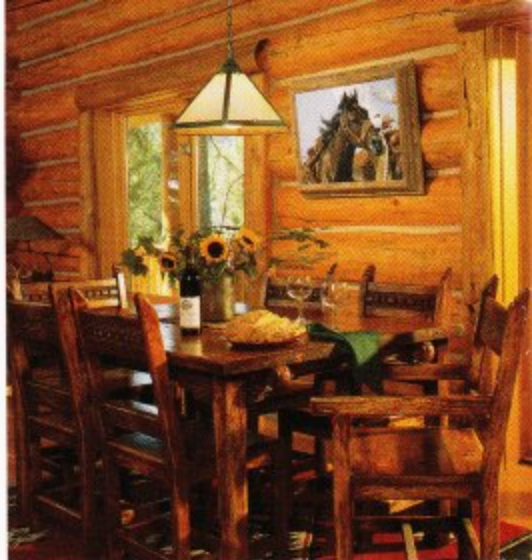
Once you have your essentials covered, it's time to indulge in the fun extras. Bring your ideas to the table, and ask your designer if they'll work within your budget. Many of your requests may be feasible; especially if what you really want is more room. Walls of windows, sky-high kitchen cabinets and a generally open floor plan can make a smaller home feel more spacious.

And remember, just because it may not be done now doesn't mean it can't be done one day. Bonus rooms can be a great place for future amenities, if you think ahead about how you might like to use the space. For example, if you'd eventually like to have a billiard room with a wet bar, plan for the extra plumbing and

wiring needs now. Retrofitting will be much more expensive or, in some cases, impossible.

5. DON'T BE AFRAID OF CHANGE.

If budget or topography makes it hard to squeeze in everything you want, don't be too disappointed. In time, you may be able to add the items you originally hoped for, if your plan is left open-ended. Many people attach decks, garages and baths late in the game, but the majority is looking to simply better adapt their plans to their building sites. Designers estimate two review-and-revise cycles to get it right. It may take a few more rounds before signing on the dotted line, and that's not only expected, it's crucial.



6. DON'T RUSH IT.

Making rash decisions about your floor plan is never a good idea. Most people who express regret about some aspect of their home usually preface the statement by saying "If only I had taken the time." Don't rush decisions; savor the journey.

Rocky Mountain Log Homes photo

The Right to Choose and Use

When you're ready to purchase a floor plan from a log home company or outside designer, be aware that you won't own the actual plan—just a one-time right to build the home. There may be a fee and some light paperwork, but this is necessary to protect both the company and the future homeowner from copyright infringement.

If you come across an existing plan that you absolutely love but want to modify, tell your architect. "A good designer from a reputable company will never knowingly use a copyrighted plan from another company," says Mary Lee Smyth of Real Log Homes in Hartland, Vermont. "My first course of action is to have the client isolate the most appealing part of the design and compare it to my own plans. Many times I can find a similar size or layout in a stock pattern."

If you do plan to alter an existing floor plan from a designer other than your own, you can't do so without permission. To protect yourself from copyright violations, remember the following tips:

- Under U.S. copyright law, a floor plan is protected the moment it is created, regardless of whether or not the creator has registered the plan with the U.S. Copyright Office.
- Copyright applies to the interior layout of a home as well as the elevations and exterior design.
- When you buy construction documents, you are actually buying a one-time license to build that house.
- Copyright law also protects derivations of the original plan. You cannot change a wall or roofline and consider it your own plan.