

# DESIGNING HOMES WITH YOU IN MIND

Long before opening a new home community for sale, a builder must ask themselves what type of homes they are going to build. Although that may sound like an obvious question, the answers seldom are. The community site plan may include a variety of lot types and sizes, which accommodate a broad range of home styles from townhomes to semi-detached, as well as fully detached homes. If so, the builder will want to develop a roster of designs which cater to a variety of age groups and meet differing affordability criteria.

Knowing what kind of homes you can build is one thing. Working out all the details of what is best for the development is quite another.

Sometimes designs that have been successful in one community are appropriate for another. These are designs that have already been built and enjoyed by homebuyers, so the builder can feel confident that new buyers will find them appealing as well.

Another option is to refresh or update existing layouts with changes and added features for which consumers have indicated a preference. This approach assures that homebuyers get a product that has been refined and improved.

I believe that the best scenario is when the builder approaches the designs from scratch; catering to the needs of a specific audience ultimately benefits the consumer.

This is the part of our business that I enjoy the most. When I look at a new piece of land with my team, we know that whatever we create will bear the Geranium name. That's why we consider our opportunities carefully, keeping in mind the most important aspect of the entire project — the homeowners whom will one day call this neighbourhood "home".

As we formulate our plans, we predict who the clients are likely to be for each new neighbourhood. Are they busy and active families with young children? Are they just starting out? Or are they empty nesters looking to downsize?

At Geranium, the more opportunities we have to start from scratch in our designs, the more we have opted to think outside the box, and change the conventional wisdom of traditional family home layouts.

Some of the design trends we are embracing include the creation of a large, open great room for families who have no use for a formal living room. By eliminating the living room,

we provide larger main floor rooms offering flexible space where children can gather after school and where guests can linger within view of the host in a chef-inspired kitchen.

Another innovative idea we are integrating in many of our homes is an "outdoor" room, or covered back porch, which can be used from early spring to late fall. Today's homeowners want an outdoor space they can easily enjoy, and some see this as an alternative to investing in a cottage.

We have also modified the garage to not only house vehicles, but to also provide storage space for sports equipment and to incorporate an area designated for recycling and waste bins. A team discussion led to the suggestion that we separate clean and dirty areas with the creation of a distinct laundry room and a mudroom. The mudroom then becomes a larger family centre/hobby room with direct access to the garage and/or outside. The laundry room is on the second level where many of today's homeowners believe it belongs.

Creating a brand new blueprint for a home provides builders with a wonderful opportunity to add to the variety of housing available to consumers today. And, at the same time, challenges us to think beyond today's needs, and to anticipate and accommodate the needs of future generations of homeowners.

After all, a home has a long shelf life, so it helps if the one you buy has been designed with you in mind. ■

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Open concept designs are popular in new homes.