

# Making Every Square Inch Count

by Jesse Singer



**I**magine this scenario: Full of excitement, you move into your newly built home. All the rooms are exactly as you've imagined them to be, and you eagerly start to arrange your treasured furniture. Everything is as it should be. Life is good. After a couple of months, however, you begin to notice some disturbing patterns to your family's life in the new home. You are spending more time eating quick meals at the kitchen's snack bar than in the gorgeous formal dining room (you know, the place where you put that heirloom dining room table that cost more than your roof). Not a single member of your family has so much as set foot in the formal living room, despite the fact that it includes a fireplace, an impressive two-story ceiling and your great-grandmother's cherished fainting couch. You start to think that spending the big bucks on those formal rooms might not have been the best idea, and you're probably right. Don't let this happen to you. Bigger is not always better.

As you choose a plan for your new home, think hard about how your family lives and which rooms you really need. If you have people over for dinner on a regular basis, you may think you need a formal dining room—but think about the last party you attended: Everybody probably ended up in the kitchen. Instead of adding a room you'll never use, consider a good-sized snack bar, as this gives people a place to set their food and drinks. Your parties will be a hit, and you'll save the expense of an additional room. Embracing smart design over more square footage will save you money and make your home more livable.

In her book *The Not So Big House*, architect Sarah Susanka uses creative techniques to open up home interiors without increasing square footage. One tactic she suggests is to use diagonal sight lines. In a square room, the diagonal line is the longest one, so “if you create a number of diagonal views, you will focus on the longest view and so perceive the house to be larger than it is. . . . If you offer unobstructed sight lines. . . the house will seem bigger and more welcoming. When you see a space, you feel invited into it. And if you see a space, you use it more often.”

Another method Susanka suggests using to create a more spacious feel without upping the square footage is to vary the ceiling heights. Even though high ceilings can be impressive, they can also be uncomfortable, because your attention is drawn upward. “We look up, marveling at ceiling height, instead of appreciating what the room has to



Plan HDS-99-351, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)

*This home's modest master suite delivers a luxurious bath with dual sinks and a pampering corner garden tub.*



Plan DW-1999, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)

Leon Thompson/Homeplans, part of Move

*Spaciousness is enhanced in this home through an open layout that incorporates the kitchen, breakfast nook and living room.*

offer at eye level. If the length and the width are longer than the height, then that is where our attention goes—the room feels longer and wider, hence bigger.” She suggests using lowered soffits, interesting woodwork or a blend of lower and higher ceilings to create the feel of separate spaces in the same room, making the home much more livable and comfortable.

One of the best ways to make every square inch count is to use the same room in a couple of different ways. An extra bedroom can double as a quiet home office. A playroom for the kids can be converted into an exercise room for you after they’ve all grown up.

Pay attention to how much traffic flows through the different rooms in your home, and consider alternate uses for the low-traffic rooms. For example, think about moving your hobbies from the basement to a rarely used formal living room. You’ll enjoy your hobby all the more if you don’t have to trudge down into the earth to participate in it, and a dusty room will get a new lease on life.

Another great way to use space wisely without limiting yourself to a square footage is to choose an expandable plan. Allowing for future space gives you room to grow without breaking the bank. It’s much cheaper to build a home with unfinished areas than it is to add on a room at a later date, or to move when your family starts to grow. You’ll have plenty of time to save up money so you can finish the room nicely, instead of stretching your budget too far up front. As a bonus, while you scrimp, save and plan for your gorgeous new rooms, you’ll have plenty of great storage space.

Future space can take on a variety of forms, from the tremendous potential of an unfinished basement to a bonus upper floor. Take a moment to look over the plan and imagine the possibilities, which might include adding a bedroom, a hobby room, a den or even an “away room.” The latter is a type of room defined in *The Not So Big House* as a room that provides an escape from the loud noises and visual distractions of the rest of the home. It could be a room full of books and a couple of comfortable chairs, or a room that’s simply different from the rest of the home: “In a light and airy interior, the away room can be a cozy and book-lined alternative. If the house is filled with dark woodwork, then the away room can be filled with light.” But these are only suggestions. You probably have lots of great ideas for what you could do with a future area, and that’s the point to



Plan APS-1717, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)

Leon Thompson/Homeplans, part of Move

*A large future area over this home’s garage makes the perfect playroom, office, den or guest room.*



Plan APS-1717, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)

*Behind this home's stylish facade lies a modern floor plan that is loaded with wonderful amenities, including a spacious master bedroom with an eye-catching stepped ceiling.*

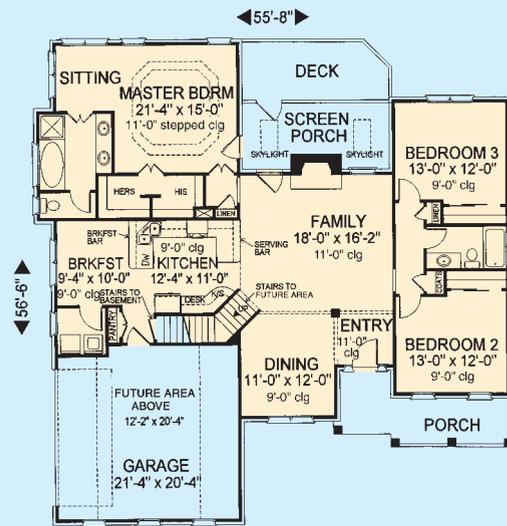
remember. Enjoy the freedom to adapt your home to your unique needs.

And now for the ultimate in adaptable rooms: the guest suite! I know, you're not a Rockefeller, but just consider the possibilities. First of all, the obvious use: You're expecting guests, and, whether family or friends, they need a place to stay. You have a nice room with private access to a bath—problem solved! Not enough, you say? You've sent your kid away to VCR repair school, but when she's done, she can't find a job. "Mom, Dad, there's nothing I can do. DVDs are making my job obsolete!" While you kick yourself for not embracing the digital revolution, you'll have the all-too-perfect spot for your boomerang child to hang out for a few months while she retrains. Still not buying it? Try on this scenario: You're starting to feel the ill effects of old age, and you don't want to burden your children. So you hire a live-in nurse, you're taken care of, and you're very glad about the guest suite that you put in when you built your adaptable home.

As you decide how your new home will be laid out, pay lots of attention to which rooms you'll actually use, and how you'll use them. If you build with this information in mind, you'll be much happier with how your home works, both now and as your family changes in the future. 🏠

Resource: Susanka, Sarah. *The Not So Big House*. Newtown, Conn.: The Taunton Press, Inc., 1998.

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Plan L-444-VACA, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)

*Expand your home's living space by choosing a plan with a sunny screened porch.*

Builder: Landers Investments, Inc.

## The Rest of the Story

In addition to the delightful screened porch pictured above, Plan L-444-VACA enjoys a broad veranda that wraps around the front of the home. Inside this attractive farmhouse-style home, you'll find an appealing layout with a large living room boasting a high ceiling and a cozy corner fireplace, as well as a bright, window-lined dining room.

Front and back porches are two of the additional highlights offered by Plan APS-1717, also pictured above. The spacious family room features a fireplace and easy access to the kitchen's smart serving bar, making the area a natural

spot for your family and friends to gather.

Additional photos and customer testimonials for these two homes are available on our Web site, where you can also explore thousands of other plans in detail. Just go to [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com) and type in the plan numbers.



Plan L-444-VACA, [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com)