

TROUBLESHOOTING FLOOR PLANS

by Soni Christensen

It pays to catch floor-plan errors when they're still on paper

The best floorplans balance form and function. Too often, one is sacrificed for the other—a critical error as today's homebuyer becomes increasingly steadfast in the demand for both. It's possible to avoid these problems by following some basic guidelines when putting together a floorplan.

Once a rough floorplan is drawn up, it needs to be fine-tuned. Now is the time to look for "trouble spots" and correct them. Fortunately, they can usually be adjusted easily—at little or no additional expense. These adjustments can often transform a so-so floor plan into one that satisfies the owner functionally and aesthetically.

The Trouble Spots

Here are some trouble spots I look at when evaluating a floor plan:

The Entry/Foyer. This is one of the most critical areas in the home. It creates that all-important first impression, and it should provide a view of



The entry foyer to this house gives a sense of home and allows for placement of a carpet and plant stand. The wet bar in the entry hall was once a large closet.

what lies beyond. Too often, entries are designed as little more than hallways. This is particularly true in condominiums where space is limited. Ideally, the entry should incorporate enough space for a few pieces of furniture—two chairs and a console table, for example. This allows the entry to serve as a comfortable point of departure (see Figure 1).

The Stairway. Often serving as part of the entry, the stairway is a difficult design element to contend with. As many of today's homes become more compact, stairways must use space efficiently while remaining functional. The most common mistake is to not allow enough room to move furniture from one floor to the next. Usually it's not discovered until the homeowner tries to move their king-sized mattress up the stairs and gets "jammed" halfway up the stairs—a problem easily solved in the floorplan stage, but a nightmare if discovered too late.

Aesthetically, stairs are more pleasing if completely or partially open on one side, with an exposed railing and attractive balusters. This allows for more light, opens up the space, and smooths the transition from entry to stairway.

Hallways. Another tricky transitional point, hallways, like stairs, often present problems when moving furniture. In one instance, my installation crew had to remove an entire door casing to get a love seat into a den. Combining stairways and hallways can lead to the dilemma demonstrated in Figure 2: While it may be appealing on paper, with its angles and bends, the plan is both illogical and impractical. It's also a tremendous waste of space.

Doors. Simple as it may appear, placing doors can also be tricky. And with the advent of the master suite has come the battle of the door returns. With bedroom/bathroom/closet combina-

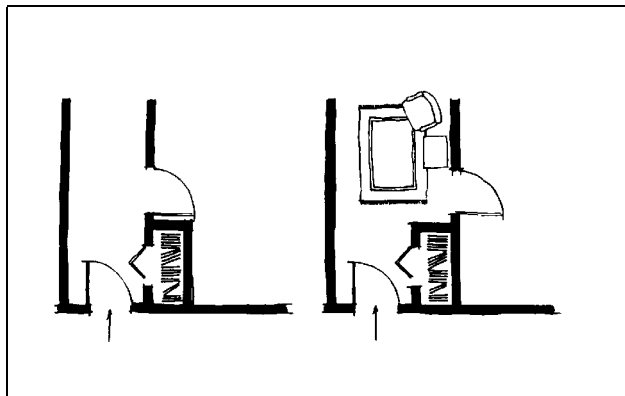


Figure 1. A foyer should serve as a "window" to the home upon entry, and as a "pause" before departure. Allow space for furniture to create this effect.

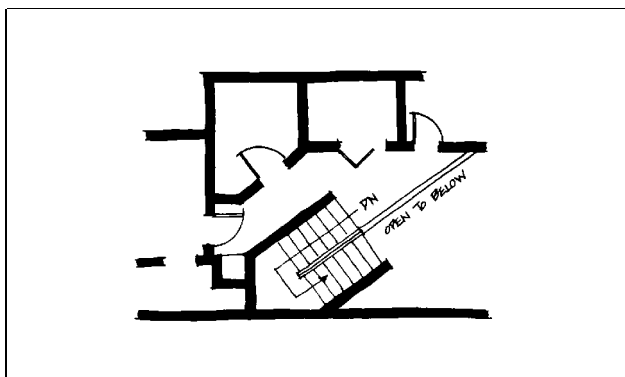


Figure 2. This stairway and hallway look great on paper, but all the angles and bends will cause havoc when the homeowner wants to place or move furniture.

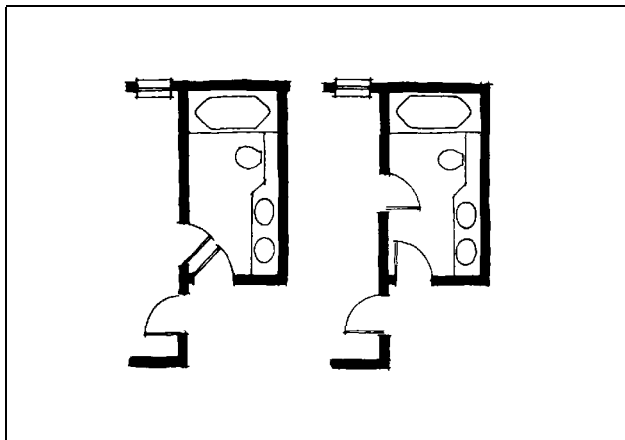


Figure 3. Many new homes connect bedrooms to bathrooms—resulting in a war between closet, bedroom, and bathroom doors. If you can't close a door without interfering with another—move it.

tions so common, I am always surprised at the lack of sensitivity demonstrated in placing the doors. If you can't open one door without it interfering with another—move it. Figure 3 is a classic example of this problem—and the solution. Moving the door over is a practical solution, and a lot less aggravating.

Bathrooms. The most common mis-

take I've seen in my work—and the biggest—is placing the toilet directly across from the bathroom door. It's unattractive, and results in a lack of privacy. The toilet should never be the focal point of a bathroom. Spotlight the vanity and mirror instead. In many cases, the arrangement of the toilet and

Planning Tips

- Allow 4 to 6 feet of clothes-hanging space, per person, in bedroom closets.
- Provide a minimum of 18 square feet of basic storage space in kitchens with an additional 6 square feet for each person usually served. For example, if a home is designed for a family of four, 42 square feet of storage is ideal.
- Modify open floor plans to allow for private space within the main living area, i.e., a room that can be closed off for use as an office, den or extra bedroom.
- Add 2½ to 3 feet to the dimension of an entry or hallway for placement of

furniture—if this is the desired arrangement.

- Do consider furniture movement when designing stairways and hallways. (Will a queen-sized boxspring fit?)
- Consider built-in furniture to enhance efficiency, and maximize the custom feel of the home.
- Consider your market. When designing for an empty-nester or elderly market, place the master suite on the first level.

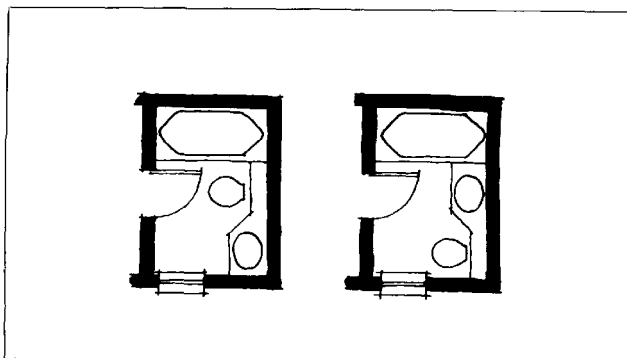


Figure 4. A common mistake is to place the toilet directly across from the bathroom door. The solution: flip-flop the arrangement of the toilet and sink.

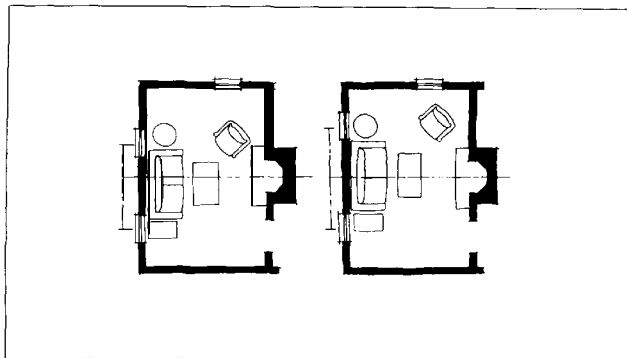


Figure 5. A fireplace needs a "conversational center" directly across from it. Off-center windows in the "before" plan didn't allow for this.



The windows in this bedroom provide the light needed without interfering with furniture placement.

sink can be flip-flopped very easily, as shown in Figure 4.

Windows. Like doors, windows are simple elements that can play havoc with any floor plan. As an interior designer, I think of a home from the inside out. Unfortunately windows are often signed in terms of the exterior look. window may be needed to balance the look on the outside, but if it lands where a closet should be, it can lead to problems. Clothes can fade, and the homebuyer won't be happy.

Window placement is critical because it directs furniture placement throughout the home. This is especially true in bedrooms where good interior sign calls for placing the bed with its end facing the entry. The ideal floor plan allows for two walls with enough centered blank space (not interrupted windows or doors) to place the bed and bureaus. In a lot of condominiums lay, lack of space tends to eliminate blank walls completely.

Figure 5 shows a similar problem in a living room, where off-center windows don't allow for the best placement of the sofa—directly across from the fireplace. The fireplace is a focal point of the room, and the floorplan should allow for a "conversational center" directly across from it. Even if there were no fireplace, the issue of centering furniture between windows would be important. But with interior wall fireplaces—more and more in vogue in new construction—it becomes even more significant.

There is no perfect floorplan. But by looking at these potential trouble spots before you build, you can take simple steps to avoid making serious mistakes (see "Planning Tips," page 53). Remember to keep in mind the balance of form and function, and chances are you'll be designing at least a near-perfect home. ■

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