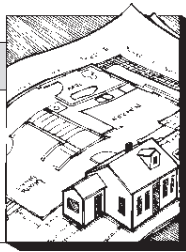


Revising a Builder's Plans for His House

by Gordon Tully



A friend who is a builder recently sent me sketches of a house he had designed and proposed to build for himself on a large lot. The site measured about 250 feet north and south by 500 feet east and west, with the road on the east and a nice view to

the west. He asked that I show him no mercy in my criticism. I agreed, hoping he meant it.

He had designed a house that suited his needs and responded nicely to the site. The living room, study, and two of the three bedrooms faced the west-

ern view; the kitchen faced south to get morning sun, and the corner dining room faced both south and west. But the plan had problems that I could explain only by redesigning it. This month's column shows both plans, along with my reasons for the changes. The pictures tell most of the story.

Basic Issues

Both plans have nice features and flaws — you can never get everything right. My changes centered around these key issues:

- The entry should serve owners as well as visitors, so I like to link

the front door with the mudroom and garage entry, rather than separating the entries.

- My friend had designed a walk-through living room with a side fireplace. I hate rooms like this, because you are in effect sitting in a corridor. Putting the fireplace at one end and a single entry between the living and dining areas creates a “cul-de-sac” seating area. It also lets you see the fire from the dining table.
- In the original plan, the stairway and interior halls received no natural light. Whenever possible, the stair should reach an outside wall,

Original Design

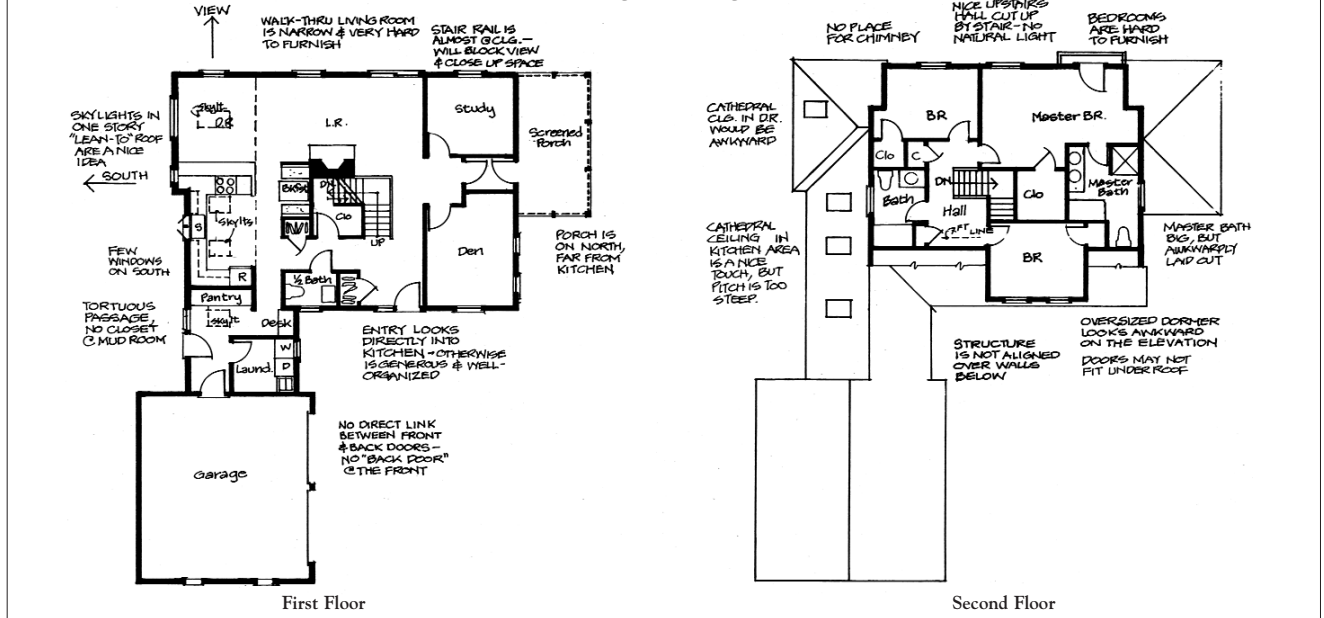


Figure 1. The key flaws in the original plan included: cramped bedrooms; a lack of light in the stairway and interior halls; a walk-through living room; and an impersonal and closetless family entrance. In addition, the front entry was not sheltered, and the porch was too far from the kitchen to be used frequently.

Revised Design

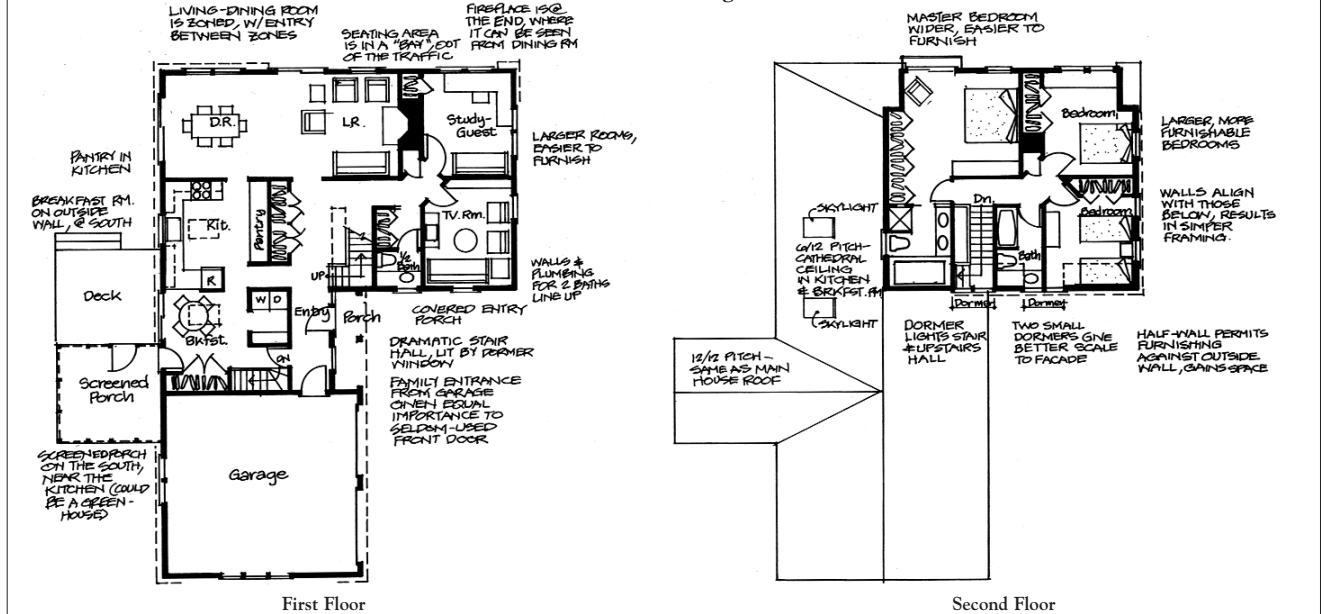


Figure 2. In this revised plan, rearranging the entry, stairway, and living room improve the traffic patterns on the first floor. Locating the covered porch off the kitchen makes it more convenient. Changes to the second floor add space and simplify the framing.

so that light may be brought into both stairway and halls.

- Bedrooms must be carefully planned so that beds and dressers will fit without being hit by swinging doors.
- At least a few walls should be common between floors, to ensure that loads get transferred easily to the interior foundations.
- Long views through a small house help make it seem larger.
- A porch that is not near the kitchen will seldom be used.
- It's nice to have a roof over the front entrance.

Putting It Together

The easy part was moving the second-floor bedrooms around: I moved the two small bedrooms to the north side, over the study and television room, and put the master bedroom over the living room. This, along with the relocated stair, made all the rooms bigger.

Solving the stairway and entry hall problem was more difficult. After trying dozens of arrangements, I created an entry hall that ran east to the garage, with the front door on a north wall instead of an east wall. This lets one entry hall serve both the formal front entry and the garage entry: the family are treated like guests, rather than sneaking into a back hall off the kitchen. It also provides for a common closet for both entries, and a porch over the front door to shelter waiting visitors.

Another crucial step was raising the

eaves along the eastern (front) face of the main house about 4-1/2 feet, giving the second story rooms a half-wall along that side of the house. This meant I could furnish right up to the east wall in those rooms. Along with substituting two small dormers for one large one, this move also greatly improved the scale of the house as seen from the front.

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Finally, the south-facing, lean-to roof over the kitchen was lowered in pitch to 6/12, which let light into the master bath above and made the cathedral ceiling in the kitchen less formidable. This also helped the scale of the house as seen from outside.

Both plans have about 2,400 square feet of floor space; my plan is slightly larger. The extra space, covered entry porch, double dormers, and half-wall in my scheme all add cost, while the simplified framing would cost less. While I am sure my plan is more expensive, I think it provides more value. ■

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