

Floor plans

Match floor plan with lifestyle

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 Special for Home Guide

A new-home model center often offers a variety of floor plans. How does a buyer go about choosing the right one?

A prospective homeowner should first think about how much space he or she actually needs, rather than simply look for the largest home possible, says Colin Covell, an interior designer with Robb & Stucky Interiors in Palm Beach Gardens. "If you buy a house that's too big, you may wind up wasting half the square footage," he adds.

Floor plans in the 1990s often had grand, two-story foyers or circular staircases to create visual drama. "Now, people are thinking more about how they'll actually use the space they have," says Mitch Kunik, an architect with Affiniti Architects in Boca Raton. "A foyer may look dramatic, but you'll walk through it in a couple of seconds, so the space won't be used very much. If you want a bathroom for every bedroom, you may be better off putting the square footage there instead of into the foyer."

Two-story ceilings in other main living areas also may not be a good

idea for everyone, says Raul Sotolongo, an architect with a Miami firm that carries his name. "With a two-story ceiling, you can wow your guests with glamour, but when you're actually sitting in the room, it won't be cozy."

Before a buyer starts house-hunting, he or she should make a wish list, Sotolongo advises. "It will help you narrow down your options. Otherwise, choices can seem overwhelming. Think about how each room relates to the others. It's important for spaces to flow, because it makes them more livable."

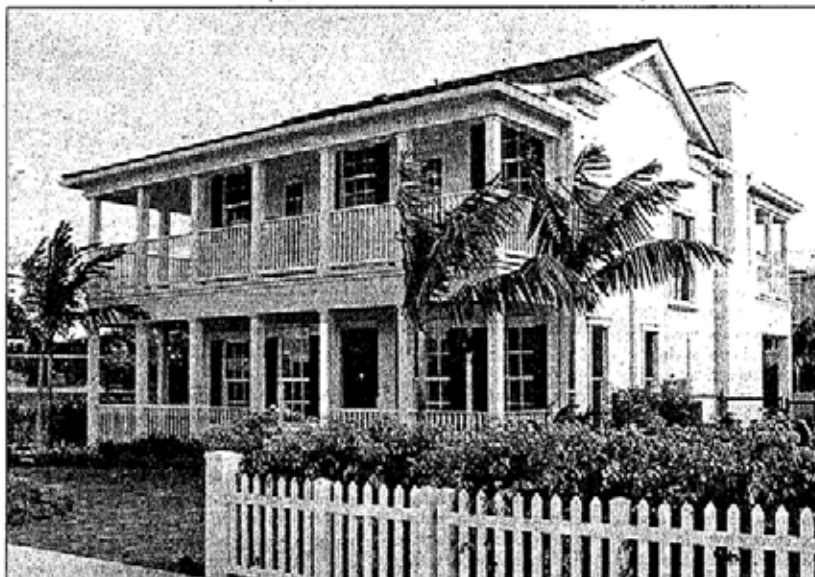
Does the buyer prefer a one- or two-story plan? "With two stories, you'll be able to get a larger house on the same lot size, so you can have more backyard," Sotolongo says.

On the other hand, if a buyer is planning to grow old in the home or has an elderly relative who visits often, stairs may not be practical.

A buyer with teenage children who opts for a two-story plan may prefer a master suite on the first floor, with secondary bedrooms on the second floor so kids and adults have their own spaces, Sotolongo says. "But if you have small children, you may want the master upstairs."



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In recent years, master bedrooms grew much larger than in decades past, and oversized whirlpool tubs became common. "Nobody really uses a tub, but builders try to jam them in because they're expected," Kunik says. "You might be better off having a nicer shower that you'll use every day, and use the extra space for a private toilet."

Just because a floor plan gives a name to a room doesn't mean it has to be used that way. "Think about multiple uses for spaces," Covell says. "You may want to use the family room that's adjacent to the kitchen as the main entertaining space, and turn the great room into a media room or a game room. A family that needs a formal dining room only on holidays may be better off with a pull-out wall unit in the library for special dinners. At other times it can be used as a partners desk."

Considering a floor plan with an open loft? "They can be great play



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areas for small children, but they frequently become wasted space because there isn't sound privacy," Covell says. "Think also about how the location of bedrooms will affect how sound travels."

Don't forget about storage. "Many people don't consider it until the last thing, or even until after they move in," Sotolongo says. "Remember that's it's very important."