



Design Process – Key questions and answers for you to consider when deciding to build that home you have been dreaming about. 121 Designs and our staff are ready to help you through the process with the goal of providing you with a positive experience and a home to meet your needs now and in the future.

What will it look like? What floor plan is right for our family? What kind of kitchen cabinets, flooring and plumbing fixtures do I want. Will it all look good together? These are just a few of the questions people ask as they begin thinking about building a new home. Many people find the whole idea too intimidating and look for an existing house that will suit their needs. For many others however, the satisfaction of choosing the location, style, floor plan and features of a new home built to meet their needs is too good to pass up.

It is not an easy process; it requires thought and diligence and a fair amount of time. When you partner with an experienced builder that you trust and can communicate with it can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. You can move into your new home and enjoy the conveniences inherent in a home designed specifically to serve your family's needs.

While we are answering some of the most frequently asked questions, a one-on-one meeting with Terry at 121 Designs will address those key questions you might have. You can also call him at **574-825-1579**.

How do I find a floor plan?

The answer is different for everyone. It can be as simple as purchasing a stock plan and building it exactly as designed. This works very well for people who have seen or toured an existing house and loved it, often because it takes a lot of the guesswork out of what the finished product will look like.

More often though, people see a stock plan that they like. But after they think about it, they want to change it by adding rooms, changing the kitchen layout or changing the exterior styling. We often assist our clients by purchasing a stock plan and personalizing it to meet their needs and to adapt it to their home site.

At the other end of the spectrum is a home we design together based on both your current and future needs, and the land it will be built on. This requires more time and effort from parties, but results in a one of a kind home that suits your lifestyle and looks like it is a natural part of the landscape.

Even if a stock plan is used, it is usually necessary to redraw it to conform to local codes and practices. We charge according to the level of service provided but the initial consultation is free of charge.

Do I have to hire an architect?

Most jurisdictions in Indiana do not require a registered Architect to draw plans for a one or two family dwelling. In Michigan it is required if the living area of a single family home exceeds 5000 square feet.

What information do you need to get started?

Whether we are looking for stock plans or designing from scratch, I always tell people to start with a file folder or notebook. Clip and save pictures of homes with features that you like, appliances, fireplaces, porches, bathrooms, color combinations, etcetera. Make a list of rooms such as living room, dining room, family room, laundry, mudroom, foyer, pantry, linen storage, closets, library, study or home office, bedrooms and bathrooms, who they are for, how big they are and what features they should include. How much do you plan to spend on the project aside from land and furnishings? There are lots of other questions that we'll discuss as we work out a design and budget. Some of them are;

Is this a primary residence or a second home?

How long you plan to stay in your new home; until the kids graduate, until retirement, through retirement?

What does your family do for fun?

Do you cook alot, seldom, only on special occasions?

Do you or your spouse work from the home?

Do you entertain? Formally or informally? How large of a group? Do you use caterers when entertaining?

What kind of recreational activities and hobbies do you have?

Do you enjoy the yard, garden extensively, hire it out or ignore it?

Are there things about your existing home or homes that you have seen that you don't like?

What special systems do you want; security, network wiring, cable TV, satellite TV, intercom, audio, surround sound, home theater, central vacuum?

What special pieces of furniture do you plan to bring or buy?

Should we have a basement?

In our immediate area most homes are built on basements. This is because of favorable soil conditions (no bedrock to blast out of the way), weather (deep frost penetration) and the weather again (shelter in severe storms). The best reason to have a basement is that it can provide plenty of space for utilities, storage and additional living area at a relatively low cost. This is an even bigger advantage if the site is suitable for a walk-out or daylight basement. Additional enhancements include egress windows for bedrooms, and plumbing for bath or kitchen areas to be finished now or in the future.

There are exceptions, but when it comes to resale value, the local market looks unfavorably on a home without a basement.

Because they are designed in other parts of the country, many stock plans are designed to be built on concrete slabs or crawl spaces. They will require modification to accommodate basement stairways, floor structure and utilities.

How does the land affect the design?

The land itself is a huge influence on how the home is designed and built. Subdivision lots with city water and sewer will have requirements for minimum square footage, setbacks from streets and property lines and architectural controls for the exterior of the house, sheds and outbuildings, fencing and exterior lighting. The lot and surrounding houses will dictate solar orientation and placement of windows for privacy and views.

For subdivision lots with well and septic systems, there are additional constraints due to the size and location of those systems required by state and local regulations.

For parcels of land outside of platted subdivisions, zoning, driveways (permit required), drainage and availability of natural gas, electricity, telephone, cable TV and access to high speed internet service also come into play.

Lake lots bring their own set of special considerations. Often they are narrow (40 to 50 feet wide) and have extremely poor access for construction. Unless municipal sewer is available, even adding on to an existing lake house can be problematic. High water tables and unstable soils are often present.

We have years of experience in dealing with difficult sites and can help you evaluate your land to determine the pros and cons along with the costs of developing it into a home site.

What about septic systems?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, properly designed, installed and maintained on-site sewage disposal systems (OSDs) are a safe and environmentally friendly alternative to municipal wastewater treatment. Modern systems are designed based on maximum daily flow from the home, an objective evaluation of the soils and slopes in which it will be placed and the depth of a water table or other limiting layer below the system.

There are several types of OSDs; gravity systems, flood-dosed systems and mound systems are most common in our area. They are selected according to the criteria described above. OSD's can range in cost from \$ 4000.00 to \$ 15,000.00

Systems can last 20 to 30 years depending on how they are used and maintained. In general, water saving appliances (washer, softener, and dishwasher) will extend the life of the system as will keeping the use of garbage disposals to a minimum.

Though not all jurisdictions require it, we highly recommend setting aside a place for a future replacement system or *reserve area*. This area should be kept clear of buildings and driveways and should not be graded or filled.

Lack of soils and slopes suitable for a septic system can render a lot unusable, even if it is acceptable in every other way. Take nothing for granted when purchasing any lot using on-site sewage disposal. Just getting a soil boring is not enough. It is important to know what type of system is required, how big it is, where it will be placed and where the *reserve area* will be. You may find that this will limit the location, the size and the design of the house (ranch or two-story) and the possibility of building a pool or outbuilding. We understand septic systems and can recommend professional assistance through our established relationships with soil scientists, soils engineers and septic designers.

How do I choose a lot or a parcel of land?

Because of the way that all of the above considerations interact we would be happy to help you evaluate any parcel of land before you buy it. The above considerations can be complex but with some forethought, perceived limitations can

often be turned to your advantage. Even if you have already chosen a subdivision or neighborhood, we can assist you in selecting the lot that will best accommodate your requirements for a new home.

I have a hard time understanding floor plans.

Most people find it difficult to visualize what a new home will look like just from looking at blueprints. That is why we use a variety of media to help our customers understand how their project will look. Our primary tool is computer-aided drawing software that not only speeds the process of drawing plans and generates three-dimensional sketches and rendered drawings.

These pictures are much easier to understand than a floor plan for most people. In addition, pencil sketches, samples, supplier show rooms and mockups are used to help clarify the details. People are often surprised when they see the finished product, but with the visual aids we provide, it is usually in good way.