

Visualizing Your Home

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As you begin the process of designing your new home, being able to visualize what your completed home will look like is critical to realizing the home that you've dreamed of. The easier it is for you to clearly understand spatially the home you are going to eventually live in, the better the design will be and the less expensive the entire process. Conversely, if you are not able to fully comprehend what your home is going to be like to live in then, you will more likely be constantly making changes in the design as you do 'get the picture', which can add substantially to the design cost or result in unnecessary compromises. Even more frightening is the possibility of not understanding your home until it is under construction. It is obvious that even minor changes at this stage are costly, and major changes can throw your budget out the window.



Being able to visualize your home in detail is a learned process, but it can be aided by the skills of the designer, technological aids, and your experience and ability to use your brain cooperatively. One way I see my role as a designer is that of a translator. You describe to me in words and images the home that has been resonating in your mind most likely for some time. I take in those often diverse collection of images and translate it into a graphic two dimensional representation of an actual physical form, your home. But before your home can be actually be built I have the responsibility of describing it to you so that you know you are getting the home you want. The description, or translation of images or mental pictures, is a two way process. The better you are at both describing the mental pictures to me as a designer and the better you are at understanding the drawings I produce as three dimensional reality, the better the home you will receive.

At the beginning of this discussion, I wish to place less emphasis on the technological representations that I can provide and more on your ability to 'think' visually. This is because, as you are a unique individual or couple, the design should come out of your visions and not simply be a reflection of what I have conceived it to be. Once you have visualized your home

and I have asked the right questions to illicit accurate descriptions, a model or computergenerated 3D image should merely confirm the success of the initial design process. In that sense, they are more tools of the designer than aids for you, the client. Even then, while they can be useful tools, they may not contain the detail that really separates an average home from an exceptional home. 3D modeling can assist in developing a series of interior 'perspectives' or 'fly throughs' but cost increases with the amount of detail; and ultimately, they are still two dimensional representations of three dimensional space. Another hurdle is that we see and live from the inside, that is from within our 'mind's eye. Looking at a 3D model, whether constructed or on a computer screen, is quite different from actually moving around within the space. In summary, they can be valuable tools but they are no substitute for the ability to conceive mentally in 3D.

I often say to my clients that my best design is often done on the couch. Yet, most often, people start the design process with a floor plan, by nature a two dimensional representation. It can assist me in understanding the basic relationships within a house, between the 'public' and more private areas in a house, those rooms that more functional in nature and those of a regenerative nature, and basic circulation patterns. But everyone knows a house is much more than a flat two dimensional arrangement. What does it feel like to sit on the couch? What can you see within the house? Can others see what you are doing? What is the soundscape? What can you see out the window? When you walk through the entry door, where is your eye drawn? Can you see or hear the more private areas of the house? This is the way we should think as we enter the design process. It doesn't take a lot of time, nor cost, just a little patience and practice.

I remember my very first assignment at Architecture School was to draw my home two dimensionally from memory. I had just moved into an apartment near the McGill University a couple of days before. Needless to say, my representation was not very accurate. But it did give me an immense appreciation of the faculty to visualization and 3D representation. Try it with your own home. Sit down and draw your floor plan of your house from memory. If possible, do it spontaneously, while at a restaurant or some other location. It will give you a good idea of where sit at the start of the design process.



Practice laying on your bed or couch and visualizing your new home. (I knew you would like this exercise). In your mind, walk through your new, yet to be drawn, home as fully as possible. Enter through various doors in the house. Imagine turning the knob and opening the door, turning on lights, as much detail as possible. Stop in one place. What do you see in all directions? It may be difficult at first, but you get the idea. The more you practice and the better you get at this, the easier it will be for us to work together and the better your home will ultimately be. As I suggest new ideas for you to consider, you will be more able to quickly understand them.

I cannot begin to count the number of times where I have been stuck on a design working with a pencil in my hand at a two dimensional level, and had major breakthroughs by simply laying down for awhile with my eyes closed, or walking onto the building site and standing in various places. My clients have often heard me speak of waking up in the middle of the night with brilliant design ideas, jumping out of bed, and sketching them. Without a doubt the most important contributions to my designs have come directly from my ability to visualize and not through manipulating shapes on a piece of paper (or computer screen).

The practice of closing our eyes and mentally walking through your home should be done at all stages of the design process. At first it may be very general, mapping out the general room layouts and movement from one part of the house to another. As the design develops, you can start adding more detail, see through one room to another, add your family actually living their lives to the picture. Add color, sounds, lighting. With a little practice you will have a pretty good idea what your home will actually be like long before construction has even started. In addition, you will have learned an immensely rich and valuable life skill in the process.

As previously mentioned, 3D modeling can aid me in confirming what you have visualized or in giving you ideas to consider. There are three basic ways that this can be done, through physically building a model, drawing a perspective sketch, or generating the same on a computer. The different methods have different costs associated with them and their ability to translate reality will vary with each project and with your own ability to visualize. Models can be as crude as cardboard cutouts or as sophisticated as wooden scale structures complete with windows. It is interesting too note that you can put your eye up to one of the window openings and get a very realistic impression of the inside of various rooms. The brain automatically adjusts the sense of scale. Models can also be used in conjunction with a sun chart to estimate the effect of roof overhangs and sunlight penetration into different parts of the house.

Sketches can also be very rough or very elaborate. They can be simple exterior perspectives or interior views within different rooms. Of course, they can be black and white or colored. They are usually quicker to generate than similar computer representations but can usually only be used once. If you don't like what you see, another drawing may have to be undertaken from scratch.



Computer generated 3D modeling can be simple 'wire-frame' drawings or more elaborate representations complete with rendered materials, shade and shadow. Interior perspectives are generally more complicated than exteriors but a series of them can be put together to form a 'fly through'. This is sometimes somewhat crude at the early stages of the design process, but once the project is drawn up in some detail, a route through the house can be picked and a 'video' produced through a successive series of perspectives.