



# ARCHITECTS AT HOME

# Introduction

The scale of the single-family house is a building form that allows, and in many cases encourages, the architect to develop an idea or ideas that include or expand their own awareness of light, space, form, and context.

Architects use the design of their own homes both as an experiment and as a representation of their own beliefs and ideals. Their grounding through education, study, and experience may form a base or starting point, but the influences of their culture, lifestyle, and the environment of their upbringing naturally form the base elements in their architecture. The architects' design positions are diverse, the context is diverse and cultures are varied. The customized house is a "one off," an architect's interpretation of design equated with the needs and values of their sense of a home. It is tailored to the architect's own family's program, and balanced by the architect's personal design perspective.

The size of an architect's own home is often an expression of their commitment to be more environmentally responsible and they scale the size of their home as a direct relationship to their needs. A home studio is where they can work and still be part of the family activities. The two-story living room with a mezzanine is being reduced in size or scale. A library of books may be replaced by the computer.

With the advent of the digital age, the future may be less defined. We can now be attached to our home without actually being there. Automation is changing the house in ways that we have not even thought of, and it will continue to do so. The new norm is change.

The rooms in a single-family house are defined and your sense of the space reinforced by how the enclosure surfaces—the walls, floor, and ceiling—form and wrap the room or space. The critical elements in defining or

expressing a room are the floor and ceiling. Is the floor level, is the ceiling raised? A second critical element is the corners; the room is now contained, it has a boundary. Once the space is defined by the enclosure surfaces, the room is still not visible to the human eye without daylight or nightlight. How light is introduced into a room through openings in the exterior surfaces both defines the space and provides the room with its identity. By not placing the window on an axis with the door, this will initially contain your vision when you enter a room. You will experience the room before your eyes wander and recognize the architectural details or the furniture and other objects placed in the room. If you place windows in the corners of a room, a Frank Lloyd Wright trademark design element, you specifically eliminate one of the room's defining elements, thereby expanding the dimensions of a room.

The vertical dimension is also important. A tall or two-story room lifts your eye upwards. A light source from above also has an uplifting feeling, similar to the light source in a Gothic cathedral. This effect can be achieved in a modest manner by allowing light to enter the room through a skylight. This light source with inclined walls from a hidden skylight reflects the descending light into the room and introduces a sense of mystery or evokes a feeling of emotion as the light source, the sun, travels across the sky. Ricardo Legorreta always talked of how his houses were designed to evoke a feeling of emotion. This is just the beginning and a small part of the architect's vocabulary and dictionary of elements that create a room, a space, or a home.

The act of a person moving from one room to another or through a series of spaces, introduces the element of circulation. The primary element in circulation is where and

how you enter the room, with the placement of the door or entry. By placing the entrance threshold at a corner, the diagonal view makes the room appear larger than it really is. By placing the door in the center, you achieve symmetry or balance. Even in an open-plan design, the point of entry is critical. Consider what it is that you first observe from this entry threshold.

A translucent skin provides a visual lightness by melding the form with the sky above or the landscape beyond. The boundaries of interior space are expanded and exterior space captured. With walls of glass, the exterior space extends the sense of the room. By way of example, in the Brick Country house designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1923, walls extend out into the landscape, thereby blurring the definition of where the interior ends and the exterior begins. In the Farnsworth house by Mies, the glass walls that wrap the house further blur the definition of the exterior, as the exterior wall becomes the landscape itself.

Alternatively, instead of expanding out into the landscape, the house can partially or wholly contain an exterior space by surrounding the space and forming a courtyard or atrium. The courtyard, a traditional house form, expands the house by forming an additional room or space.

With the minimalist movement, clarity in the design of the room or space is seen as the dominant element. The addition of furniture may deconstruct the expression and power of the room as the objects in the space begin to cloud the focus. A fireplace, paintings on the walls, or the furniture personalize the room. Occupying the room provides that all-important sense of ownership.

The architect's palette and selection of materials is nearly endless, with the more traditional materials of concrete, stone, metal, wood, and glass, and the more flexible materials of plywood, plastic, and plaster, now supplemented with a fairly extensive list of new and composite materials. Infinitesimal designs and forms are now possible with this array



of materials. But a material needs space to be appreciated or can occasionally be contrasted or highlighted with a second material. The traditional finished surface is usually smooth or an even texture, but now architects are exploring ways of modulating this surface, even with traditional tools.

The moral responsibility today and in the future is to tread more lightly on the land and to reduce our personal consumption. The move towards the zero energy house is not solely technical but shows how responsible we are in the selection and use of materials that require lower energy in both production and maintenance. Placement of the house on a site is also important: is the house oriented towards the sun, to take advantage of the sun's heat when needed, but also protected from the sun with shading when the sun's heat is not needed. For example, Villa Girasol in northern Italy actually tracks the sun as the house rotates. Architects are at the forefront of this energy reduction and sustainable movement.

The architectural design elements that expand one's awareness of interior and exterior spaces and the iconic image of "home" are so diverse and numerous that the single-family house has become the archetype for the positive exploration of new spatial ideas and forms that reflect the various cultures and personal traits of the owners. The houses that follow represent a small segment of the designs that result from a successful collaboration between the architect as the designer and the architect as the owner.

John V. Mutlow, FAIA

Professor  
ACSA Distinguished Professor  
University of Southern California

NEXT  
LEVEL  
LIVING

DOMENIC ALVARO





There are also considerable sustainable designs incorporated into the curved structure of the house, appropriately named Silo House. For example, the architecture utilizes the original cooling mechanism of the silo, whereby cool air would be sucked up through subterranean air ducts and circulated through the interior to cool the wheat or grain. This mechanism, combined with an operable skylight atop the silo, has been harnessed to deliver passive cooling for the house. Interior spaces are carefully measured, with the kitchen, bathroom, and storage amenities contained within a 3-inch (7.6-centimeter) crescent that abuts the interior southern wall, maximizing floor space and spatial volume.

When asked to describe the project in three words, Kaiser chooses “compact, bold, elemental.” This home, of great architectural rigor and innovative use of space and materials, is an exceptional example of the rehabilitation challenge that is of great personal significance to the architect and the community.









DOUGLAS LARSON

COUNTRYSIDE  
CHARM







Douglas Larson designed this house for his family, transforming and reviving a dilapidated old farmhouse. Sited on a stunning backdrop of Stanfordville countryside in New York, the house was originally built in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Numerous renovations had left no features of the original house so the design was not constrained to the usual limitations of a historical renovation, freeing Larson to design more personally. Elements harvested for re-use were the two-over-two windows, some clapboard siding, an antique bathtub, and old board doors. The effect is a gentle, handsome aesthetic that highlights the existing and new histories of the house, and is juxtaposed beautifully against the dark greens of the surrounding environment.

HEAD IN  
THE CLOUDS

DAVID LUCK



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