

# How to Read Blueprints

by Anne Marie Hanley

What do all these little boxes and lines and squiggles mean?

How tall will the finished home be? Will our new couch fit in the living room?

These questions and others about your home plan may be answered by understanding how to navigate a set of blueprints.

Professionally drawn blueprints contain a wealth of information. Although symbols and callouts can vary slightly from one architect or home designer to another, knowing a few of the basics will assist you in distilling a clear picture of your home from the seemingly tangled web of lines, numbers, shapes and letters.

Below is one of our popular designs, Plan L-215-VSB. Some details have been moved or omitted for the sake of clarity. Please visit [www.homeplans.com](http://www.homeplans.com) for more information about this design.

## Bathroom Fixtures

- 1 ● Vanity with Sink
- 2 ● Bathtub
- 3 ● Shower Stall
- 4 ● Toilet

## Kitchen

### 5 ● Gas Lines

A quartered circle marks the spot of a gas line. These are likely to be found behind the range, oven and dryer.

### 6 ● Water Hookups

These crossing lines indicate the presence of a water line. Note that this design allows for a refrigerator that dispenses ice and/or water through the door.

### 7 ● Snack Counter

A snack counter or eating bar often has rounded edges and extends from a fixed work surface. Some are raised above the main countertop, as this one is. Its height is listed nearby.

### 8 ● Cabinets

A dotted line parallel to the line indicating a row of cabinets means there are two tiers of built-ins, separated by work space. Elevations of the kitchen and baths on the following pages of the blueprints show full-on views of the configurations of these fixtures.

## Interpretation Aids

### 9 ● Dimension Lines

Lines running the width and depth of the home that have hash marks at either end and a number, in feet and inches, at the center are dimension lines. Dimension lines also measure rooms and other features inside the home. They are printed in light blue on this reduced sample in order to avoid obscuring other details.

### 10 ● Comments

Printed here in green, a designer's comments will include information such as door and window sizes, suggested flooring materials for each room and anything else needed to clarify the design or function of what you see on the plans.

### 11 ● Scale

In the legend of the blueprints, or directly underneath the floor plan, the scale is listed. In this case, the scale is  $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'$  (on the original plan—not this facsimile). This means that, because  $\frac{1}{4}''$  goes into 12" 48 times, every measurement on the floor plan is equal to 48 times that measurement on the blueprints. An architect's rule, available at art supply stores, can be useful for determining the actual dimensions of the home.

### 12 ● Total Square Footage

A section of the blueprint page is typically devoted to a listing of the total square footage of the home and of its major parts, such as the main floor, the upper floor and the garage.

### ● Electrical Outlets

Two short lines and a circle against a wall illustrate the location of an electrical outlet. Outlets are not shown on this floor plan; many architects show the electrical layout on a separate sheet.

### 13 ● Ventilation

This space is set aside for an air reclamation shaft. The ceiling in the adjacent bathroom is furred down to 7'-6" to make room for more ductwork; hence, the diagonal lines in this room.

## Basic Features

### 14 ● Door

The straight line with an attached curve indicates a door and the direction it swings. The nearby note identifies the type of door. A schedule on the plan contains a legend for the types of windows and doors used in the design (see **Comments**, opposite page).

### 15 ● Pocket Door

A straight line that slides into a wall represents a pocket door, which is a space-saving alternative to a standard swinging door.

### 16 ● Window

Windows are shown as rectangles along a wall. The notations near each specify the type; in this case, "CM" stands for case windows.

### 17 ● Stairs

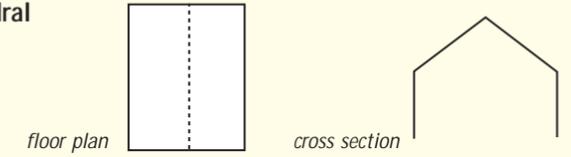
In the stairwell, look for storage areas or a staircase leading to another level.

## Ceilings

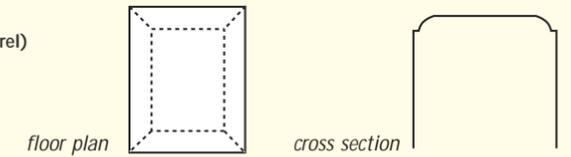
### ● Ceiling Types

Vaulted, sloped, cathedral, tray, stepped. These and other ceiling treatments are represented on the floor plan by dotted lines. A cathedral or vaulted ceiling, for instance, will be shown as a straight, dotted line. The broken lines denoting a tray, or gambrel, ceiling are in the shape of an upside-down serving tray. A stepped ceiling, also known as a racetrack ceiling, is illustrated using concentric, dotted rectangles.

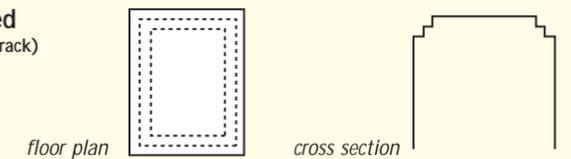
### Cathedral



### Tray (or Gambrel)



### Stepped (or Racetrack)



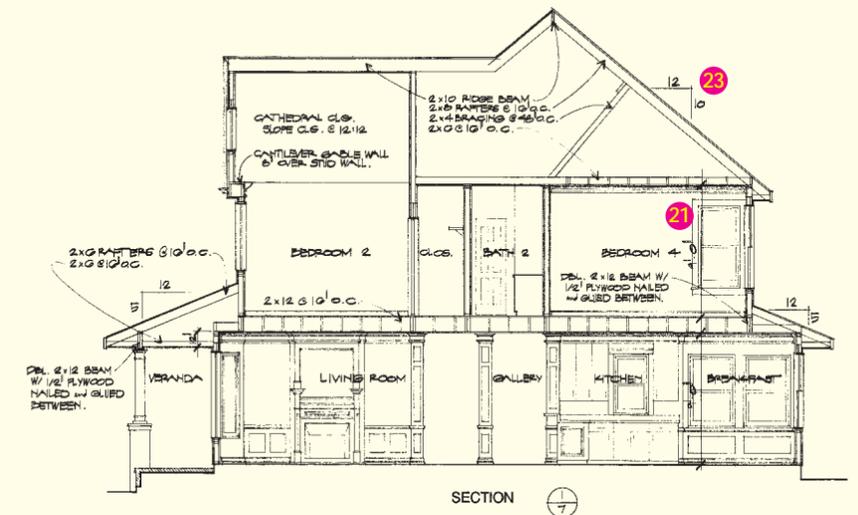
### 21 ● Ceiling Heights

The height of a ceiling, if not noted on the floor plan itself, can often be discerned from the cross section of the room in question. Ceiling heights are called out in both places on this plan.

## Cross Sections

### 22 ● Cross Section Callout

On the floor plan, a bisected circle with numbers and/or letters in it signals that a cross section is available for the room indicated. The bottom number in the circle references the page on which the cross section can be found; the top letter or number shows the location of the image on the page. The arrow on one side of the circle shows the direction of the cross section's view. This plan's cross section is not a straight slice; a broken line (printed here in red) traces its edge through the breakfast nook, the kitchen, the gallery and the living room. The cross section is reproduced below.



### 23 ● Roof Pitch

Two numbered lines that meet at a 90-degree angle and are located near a roofline show the roof pitch. The number on the vertical line is the rise; that on the horizontal line is the run.

### 18 ● Fireplace

The red circle shows the placement of a gas line.

### 19 ● Hose Bib

This is the technical term for an exterior faucet. Note the crossed lines, which indicate the presence of a water line (see **Water Hookups**, opposite page).

### 20 ● Columns

A square, sometimes with a circle inside it, indicates a column. In this plan, columns run along the perimeter of the porch; they also line the gallery, which separates the dining and living rooms from the kitchen.

