



At last, you've found the home plan that best meets your family's needs. But there are a few changes you'd like to make to ensure the plan truly becomes your dream home. Would the kitchen better accommodate your love for baking or entertaining if it were just a bit bigger, or would the addition of a door between the master suite and the adjacent bedroom make it easier to use that bedroom as a nursery down the road? Perhaps your geographic location necessitates minor changes to conform to local codes.

Upward of 75 percent of stock-plan buyers modify their plans in some way, estimates Jim Verhaest, director of sales of St. Paul-based Homeplans Design Services, a national modification company.

"Mail-order plan services are intended as a very cost-effective way for consumers to find their dream homes,"

Verhaest explains. "But like snowflakes, no two dream homes are exactly alike."

Perhaps you've already created a list of changes you'd like made to your home plan. Hiring a designer to personalize your pre-designed plan allows you to capitalize on affordability with specialization, realizing the dream of a perfect new home in the process. For a smaller price than a custom-drawn home, modifications can tailor your stock home plan into a design that's as good as a custom home.

Verhaest says that modifications fall into one of three categories—regionalization, personalization and customization.

Regionalization brings a plan up to local codes. For example, the roof of a home designed in Florida might need to be made steeper if it's to be built in a state that receives significant snowfall. A home built in California, but

three masterful homes, one master plan



Exterior modifications give Plan HDS-99-179, shown at left, three different faces.

1. A cobalt blue door and geometric accents set off the home's cream stucco exterior and snow-white columns.

2. Stucco and a subtle, variegated brick pattern create visual texture while the understated color scheme allows the arched columns to take center stage.

3. A clay-tile roof gives this home its Spanish accent. The garage door opens to the far right; this, along with the front doors and smooth, white columns, works to emphasize the front entrance.



Builder: Hamilton Breed Homes



See Plan HDS-99-179 at www.homeplans.com.

Builder: Sago Builders

Hiring a designer to personalize a pre-drawn plan can give you the home you've always wanted and save you a fortune over an original design.



first steps

designed in Georgia, probably needs to be modified to withstand earthquakes.

Common personalization requests made by Homeplans customers include rearranging room layouts and adding or subtracting square feet to a room. Customers often wish to rearrange a bedroom's layout, for example, to convert it to a study or a home office. Another popular personalization modification is to create a reading nook or a den by opening the master bedroom to an adjacent, unused bedroom.

"What we see," Verhaest notes, "is the push and pull, the adding and deleting of square footage." A customer can also customize a home design by adding fun details—a home theater, built-in cabinets flanking a fireplace or decorative columns between two rooms.

Local design firms and companies that only modify existing plans can customize your stock blueprint for between \$20 and \$120 per hour. An average modification costs \$800 to \$1,500, according to Verhaest. Add this cost to that of the original blueprints and, in the end, a modified stock plan still costs thousands of dollars less than a comparable, custom-drawn plan.

Before hiring a design firm to modify your plan, it's helpful for you to experiment with design ideas, determine exactly what you'd like to change and be able to communicate these changes to both the designer and the builder constructing your home.

Homeplans also offers products that allow you to take control of this process: pre-packaged home planning kits. Each kit provides you with the tools to plan out, relocate and change nonstructural interior and exterior details in your blueprint. The Customize-It Kit's drawing template, for instance, allows you to draw in door swings, bathroom fixtures, utilities and more. Commonly referred to as "redlines," nonstructural changes such as modifying a room size, relocating a kitchen or bath fixture or enhancing the home's exterior details can be accomplished with this kit. Homeplan's Interior Design and Landscape Kit includes a landscaping, interior design and home furnishings template to place and trace furniture, draw in

cabinets and create your own landscaping plan. Both are available for purchase in the "Customize Plans" section at www.homeplans.com.

Once you've thought out and put on paper your desired changes, you're ready to hire a professional to incorporate them into your final construction plans. Homeplans Design Services offers complete modification services for stock blueprints. "We've built an entire business around helping meet people's design needs," Verhaest explains, "with pre-drawn home plans as a starting point."

To modify a plan, Design Services or any other professional designer, architect or engineer requires the use of a reproducible blueprint or CAD file to modify an original home design. Reproducible blueprints are drawn on vellum paper, which is very thin, almost transparent, and erasable. Once a detail is erased from the original design, a different detail can be redrawn in its place.

By authorizing the ability to change the original design of a plan, the designer essentially relinquishes his copyright on a reproducible blueprint or CAD file. For this reason, the price of these products is higher. With the license that comes with these designs, up to 12 copies can be made of the newly created plan for the construction of a single home only. If needed, vellums can be flipped over before copying to create a mirror-reversed set if the homeowner wants the home built in the opposite orientation as the original.

A few simple modifications can make the difference between a regular home plan and your dream home. "Stock plans are designed for the mainstream, not for the needs of a particular family," Verhaest concludes. "Modifying plans makes up for that."

To find a reputable designer to modify plans, check out the yellow pages and talk with friends and/or colleagues who have built homes recently. For references, call the American Institute of Architects, the American Institute of Building Design or the local chapter of the Home Builders' Association. You can reach Homeplans Design Services by calling toll-free 1-888-266-3439. ♣