

Attention to the crucial relationship between your new home and the site will offer spectacular results. Take the time now to ensure that your new home will offer you and your family years of satisfaction.

VIEWING A HOME FROM EVERY ANGLE

BY JIM ZIRKEL



Plan HDS-99-154

Many people put the cart before the horse when planning their new homes. In many cases, a family will fall in love with a floor plan and pay little or no attention to the site where the plan is to be built.

Instead of treating the floor plan and the homesite as different elements, it is important to understand the relationship between the two and how they can work together to produce spectacular results. By accentuating the positive aspects of a homesite, you'll gain the best views and allow yourself more privacy and control over "problem" areas that may need camouflage.

Purchasing a Homesite

Many of the issues to consider when selecting a homesite have little to do with the land and everything to do with lifestyle. Some important issues include school districts, property taxes and proximity to work. When you start to shop, you'll discover that homesites are as individual as the owners.

One distinction between homesites is subdivision lots versus single parcels of land. Subdivisions usually offer owners a homeowners association and/or an architectural review board, which works to maintain a level of protection over property values.

Single-site homesites usually offer larger tracts of land, more privacy and the opportunity to express individuality in the home's exterior, without having to submit plans for community approval.

After considering all of these items, it's time to evaluate the homesite's physical characteristics. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the site heavily treed?
- Is it level or sloping in appearance?
- Is the elevation above the 100-year flood plain?
- What are the deed restrictions and setbacks?

Problems crop up in unusual places. For instance, your homesite may have a beautiful, natural appearance now, but when cleared for construction, the top six inches of soil will be gone. This means that the grass, natural shrubbery and small trees will be removed from the construction area, and may leave you with land that looks very different.

Heavily treed homesites are appealing to many people, but can present additional construction costs. In order to build,



These spectacular homes (Plans HDS-99-179 on top and HDS-99-177) feature angled walls that allow panoramic views across enormous and inviting backyard patios.

Photos by Mark Englund/Homeplans, part of Move

crews need to remove all the trees within seven feet of the house, as well as the trees in the areas of the driveway, sidewalks, septic tanks and drainfield. Many regions also require permits to remove trees.

Low-lying or sloping homesites can also add considerable construction costs to a project. The costs of fill dirt and special construction requirements add up quickly, especially if the home is susceptible to drainage problems or sits in the 100-year flood plain. To determine if this is the case, check with your local building officials or request from the owner a survey showing the lot's topography.

If the sloping homesite has a great view, you may want a custom floor plan developed that follows the lay of the land. In the case of a steep mountain elevation, for example, you could have a basement or garage built into the slope.

Beware of setbacks and deed restrictions. Before you purchase a site, make sure that it can accommodate the home you want to build. Setbacks are regulated by the zoning department and can be confirmed with your building department. In special cases, a variance can alter the setback requirements, but that can be time-consuming and difficult to obtain.

Deed restrictions can contain requirements on the size, style and appearance of a home. Check with local officials and ask the seller to disclose restrictions that might compromise the style of the home you plan to build.

Working with an Existing Homesite

If you own property, but are not excited about the view, don't worry. There are many creative floor plans designed to create spectacular views.

One solution is the courtyard design. By opening either the front, middle or rear of your home onto a courtyard, you can capture a view and transform it into a personal oasis. Many

urban residences and zero-lot-line homes utilize this concept around a pool or garden, while feet away, the fencing or shrubbery hides adjacent homes.

Other captured views with which you may be familiar include atriums and private gardens. Designers use these features to enhance master suites, private sitting areas and other interior areas that require natural lighting and privacy.

If you are fortunate enough to have property that overlooks a lake, golf course, ocean or wooded area, you'll probably want to take advantage of its positive attributes. First, study the land carefully. Have a land survey conducted and, in heavily wooded areas, consider a tree survey.

After review by your plan designer, the site should be visited and photographed from the position of the house looking out in all directions. By considering all angles of the property, the designer will be able to adapt the floor plan to the site.

One technique that designers often use is a series of angular walls that allow several rooms to look out on a rear view. By turning the house's orientation, it is also possible to direct the view so that it looks down a fairway or across a canal.

Blending a perfect floor plan and a homesite is not easy, but you'll be glad you made the effort. By taking educated steps and by working with a professional designer or architect, you'll see that the results can surpass your wildest dreams.



James Zirkel has been in the architectural and residential design business for over 40 years. Educated at The Ohio State University, he began his career in Mansfield, Ohio, in 1966. In 1978, he moved his company to Orlando, Florida. He has won national recognition in the American Institute of Building Design. Zirkel is a member of the Home Builders Association, was associate vice-president in 1990, and Associate of the Year in 1992. He is also a certified member of the American Institute of Building Design and a Certified Professional Building Designer.