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# How to design your dream custom-built home

There are many advantages to designing your own home. Gone are the builder-basic styles, layouts that don't work for your family and exteriors you can't tell apart from your neighbors'. To help with your planning, check out these tips.

Find the right property. There are no limits to what you can create with a custom-built home, but the size and quality of your lot do impose restrictions. While you don't need to have everything decided when you purchase the property, make sure you have a general

idea of what you need - your architect can help with this. Also, double check zoning laws, so you don't wind up not being able to build your dream three-story home on a residential street that only allows bungalows.

Consider your lifestyle. What kind of lifestyle do you want to live? What's important to you? From bigger elements like smart home automation and sustainability to smaller considerations like storage and organization, think of these things when designing the layout and built-in

elements. For example, if you hate shoveling, now is the opportunity to make sure you have the shortest driveway possible.

Build for the future. Your needs and wants right now are at the top of your mind, but a custom home is a significant investment in time, money and energy. It's also likely you want this to be your forever home, so it's a smart idea to build for tomorrow. Think about how your family will evolve and what your future needs will be. Consider building materials that are de-

signed to stand the test of time, like insulated concrete forms (ICFs) from Nudura. This alternative to wood framing is a greener option and offers disaster resilience against high winds and fire. The superior insulation also means more comfortable, uniform indoor temperatures and less money spent on heating and cooling your home.

Avoid the fantasy trap. This is your dream home, so it's okay to indulge on that outdoor fireplace or luxury bathroom tiles that you've been envisioning. But to keep your



budget in check, focus on the priorities and items that will give you the best value for your dollar. Invest in features that will improve your everyday living and boost your property value, like energy-effi-

cient construction or a finished basement.

Find more information about designing your new home with insulated concrete forms at nudura.com.

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# A lesson in building a backyard retaining wall

Flat, even landscapes are often coveted in backyards. However, flat backyards are not always so easy to find. Fortunately, varied terrain does not mean that certain landscaping plans are entirely off limits, especially for homeowners willing to build retaining walls.

Retaining walls help turn steep slopes in a yard into terraced focal points. They also can reduce soil erosion in hilly areas and can be used for aesthetic purposes, like raised planters, or to create more

usable space within the yard. When an in-ground pool or pond is cut into a backyard hill, a retaining wall helps keep the remaining portion of that hill from collapsing into the cut-away area.

When contemplating retaining wall projects, a lesson in physics and engineering may be needed. A sturdy and long-lasting retaining wall needs to be built in a way that will take into consideration the force of the soil and the point at which the soil will begin to slide away,

advises the experts at The Family Handyman. If these calculations seem beyond the scope of your ability, installation of a retaining wall is a job best left to a professional. If you are ready to forge ahead, these tips can get you started. However, it's important to note the potential benefits of working with others who have already built a retaining wall.

· Safety first: Call to have underground utilities plotted and marked before beginning any Walls, see Page 4

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## Walls Cont. from Page 2

excavation.

· Map out your trench and begin to dig. The trench should have a level, compacted base as it will be the foundation for which the retaining wall materials, be they blocks, bricks or wood, sit in. A crushed stone base will help anchor the courses and serve to promote drainage. The Family Handyman says to bury the first course of the retaining wall one-tenth the height of the wall to prevent soil from pushing the bottom out.

When placing blocks or timbers, make sure they are even with the first and periodically check for level as you go, advises the home improvement retailer Lowes®.

· Stagger and set back. The next row of blocks or material should be positioned so that the joints are staggered for blocks, bricks or wood. A masonry blade will be needed to cut the harder materials; a circular saw will cut timber. Also, work against gravity by setting the second course

slightly back from the first to help push back against the soil that is trying so hard to push forward. Repeat the process as each level is placed. Many retaining wall products are made with a lip to create this set back.

· Go with the grade. For especially steep slopes, a gradual step-up design may be more secure and more appealing than a very tall retaining wall. Each level of a stepped design should be done like the first.

· Backfill with stone



for drainage. Using a layer of stone behind the retaining wall can help successfully direct water away so it will not increase the weight

of the soil behind the wall and push against the retaining wall, advises The Home Depot.

Retaining walls serve different purposes in a

yard. Building such a wall requires planning and careful execution to ensure the job is done correctly.

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# How to prevent slips and falls in the bathroom

Bathrooms can serve as sanctuaries, providing a warm tub to soak in after a long, weary day or a private place to retire for a few minutes of peace and quiet. Bathrooms also can be dangerous places, as various groups warn that most slip and fall accidents that occur at home will happen in the bathroom.

The combination of hard surfaces and moisture from sinks and showers can create dangerous conditions. Furthermore, bathrooms tend to be small spaces, so should a fall occur, it's more likely a person will hit various surfaces on the way down.

The risk of falling in a bathroom increases with age. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, seniors over age 65 have a 25 percent chance of falling in the bathroom. Seniors generally have less flexibility and balance than younger people, meaning falls can be life-threatening. Bones easily can become fractured and internal bleeding may occur in serious cases. Bathrooms can be made more safe in a few simple ways.

- Keep the bathtub clean. Soap residue or other grime can contribute to slippery conditions in the shower

and tub. Cleaning these surfaces frequently can improve traction.

- Declutter the space. Remove extraneous items from the bathroom that can pose as tripping hazards.

- Choose the right bath mat. Bath mats can contribute to slips and falls. For those

who cannot live without them, choose a mat with slip-resistant backings and add double-faced tape for added security.

- Limit moisture. Use a weighted shower curtain or install shower doors to prevent water from getting on the floor. Mop up any water or additional condensation to help dry the bathroom.

Install an exhaust fan to help vent moisture that can condense and accumulate on the floor and fixtures.

- Improve bathroom lighting. Make sure lighting in the bathroom illuminates all areas.

- Wear non-slip shoes. Wearing non-slip shoes when in the bathroom can reduce the chances of slipping

on wet floors.

- Install a walk-in shower or bathtub. These lipless fixtures can assist those who have difficulty entering a standard tub or shower. Grab bars also can help with maneuvering in and out of the shower area.

- Use a raised toilet seat. A raised toilet, or one with a special seat that reduces the

distance one has to go to reach a seated position, may help prevent falls.

Any individual with a health condition that causes vision disturbances or difficulties with balance should work with a doctor to find a resolution. These conditions may contribute to falls.

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# How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between ap-

pearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

## Kitchen

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a

home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such ar-

eas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate counter tops and simplify meal preparation.

## Formal dining room

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly

33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them

up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

## Living room

Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding

Lighting, see Page 9

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# The average timelines for popular renovation projects

Home renovation projects are significant undertakings. Working with skilled and experienced contractors can ensure projects go smoothly and are completed promptly. Timing is a big consideration for homeowners as they begin renovating their homes, and the home improvement experts at HomeAdvisor note that the following are some general timelines for popular renovation projects.

**Home addition:** Short of a full-scale demolition and rebuild, home additions are the most time-consuming projects homeowners can undertake. HomeAdvisor notes that its survey of customers who recently completed home addition projects reported that the average time from start to finish was between three and four months. Certain variables, including the scale of the project and the local permits process, can extend the time it takes to complete a home addition.

**Kitchen remodel:** Scale is a big factor to consider when estimating the time it takes to complete various home improvement projects, and kitchen remodels are no exception. Some HomeAdvisor

users reported projects taking as long as four months, though the average time reported was roughly six weeks. Projects that require major overhauls like rearranging the plumbing and moving walls will likely take longer than more cosmetic projects that are limited to replacing cabinets and countertops.

**Bathroom remodel:** More than 1,000 homeowners surveyed by HomeAdvisor reported that bathroom remodels took about 4.5 weeks from start to finish. Small-scale remodels that focus on painting the walls a fresh color and replacing existing tiles can be completed in less than two weeks. But like with kitchen remodels, bathroom remodels that involve replacing plumbing fixtures and removing walls figure to take much longer than that.

**Siding installation:** HomeAdvisor users report that new siding projects take roughly two weeks from start to finish. That estimate is the same regardless of which materials homeowners are replacing and installing.

**Replacement windows:** Homeowners who want to replace all the windows in their home can ex-

pect such a project to take roughly three weeks. HomeAdvisor notes that such a timeline need not

concern homeowners worried that they will be forced to brave the elements during the length of the project.

Much of a contractor's time during a window replacement project will be spent on up-front measuring and

then ensuring a tight fit once the windows have been installed.

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**Lighting**  
Cont. from Page 6

between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces.

es. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger. Bedroom

The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines.

Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for

their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert

or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide

both practical and aesthetic appeal.



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# The benefits of working with an interior designer

Home is where the heart is, and it's also where homeowners express their style. Though interior design may come naturally to some homeowners, many more can benefit from a little help defining their style and translating that style into a beautiful home. In such instances, interior designers can be the most valuable investments homeowners make in their homes.

Homeowners may hear "interior designer" and immediately hear the sound of cash registers ringing in their heads. However, many interior designers offer various services, including hourly consultations, that can make them cost-effective, especially for homeowners

who are still trying to define their style and decide just how they want their homes to look. That's just one of the many benefits of working with interior design professionals.

Interior designers can save homeowners money. Much like it's best for homeowners with no DIY experience to hire professional contractors when renovating their homes, paying an interior designer when you have little experience with design can help you avoid potentially costly mistakes. Interior designers are skilled at transforming homeowners' visions into finished products, and that's a valuable skill homeowners don't necessarily have. Trial and error when designing a

home's interior can be costly, even if you're not knocking down any walls or swinging any hammers. For example, after renovating on their own, homeowners may find they need to replace a new couch or dining table that they realize contradicts their design scheme. Interior designers can help homeowners avoid such costly mistakes and get it right the first time.

Interior designers are well-connected. Interior designers often

collaborate with contractors. Those professional relationships can help homeowners avoid the headaches of finding the right professionals to work with when renovating their homes.

Many a homeowner has benefitted from working with interior designers. Such partnerships can help homeowners transform their residences into the home of their dreams.

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