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SPRING HOME DESIGN

A SPACE ODYSSEY

DESIGN SOLUTIONS
LARGE AND SMALL



gold yellows and hyacinth blues.

Do they differ in their layouts and furnishings?

Yes, the furnishings and layouts are dictated by the architecture, which is true of most small spaces. You have to get the plan right in a tiny place. I moved my bed three times in the New York apartment, which is 500 square feet. Well, not 100 times, but a lot, since I wasn't getting a Murphy bed.

What are your secrets to living small?

You hone down to essentials. Everything has to be something you really like and have a function or some other two functions, such as a daybed for sitting that also serves as a place for guests to sleep with a curtain to pull it off. You don't have room for just decorative stuff. Lighting is important and you need a lot of sources to make the space seem bigger and illuminate corners. A floor-to-wall carpet, a large area rug or one type of flooring helps everything appear on the same plane. You can't use tiny area rugs.

Any other tricks?

You make the space function better. L.A. doesn't have a working kitchen since the home is near restaurants. In New York, I mostly eat out, so kitchen cabinets hold nothing. In Florida, I ripped out the kitchen and turned it into a guest area the size of a bunk room.

Do colors make a difference?

Yes, but I don't believe in rules or conventions, especially in small spaces. I love color, use it richly and like to change colors periodically.

The Duxbury cottage is the largest at 725 square feet.

Does it feel too large?

No. But one reason it also feels bigger is that it's on the ocean and marsh, so it's expansive, as is Florida, which has a balcony where I can sleep. New York and L.A. are more interior.

Do you have creature comforts in each?

Absolutely—TVs, my music, books and clothes. I don't have to travel with much. I have a "station" car in my car but cab everywhere else.

How do you manage that?

Each home has a separate sleeping space. I make the beds feel comfortable but at the same time part of a living area. They always come back, so they must like it.

What about the logistics of managing multiple homes?

I try to stock essentials before I leave each time, so when I arrive they're there. But, I also shop for fun, especially in Duxbury, where finding corn on the cob is a pleasure.

How do you decide where to go?

Home is by client demand, plus shopping for business, which I do in L.A. I go there once a month or twice if I'm not working. Duxbury is by season; I open it before Memorial Day and shut it down in fall. Then, it's time to go to Florida, which is where I spend holidays and long weekends.

What if you could own just one of your houses?

My accountant asked me that when I was refinancing. I would never give up New York because of work, but I would give up Duxbury. It's closest to my roots, I love the land, but I couldn't make a living there.

Are there any more houses on your drawing board?

Yes, I'm thinking of a tiny house in Savannah's historic district because that city has qualities I like. The main part about multiple homes is having four cable and electric bills to pay. I write a lot of checks monthly. But, I

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They no longer appear just on television shows such as "Dynasty" or as an anomaly in the country's most affluent suburbs. Large, sprawling houses that could be mistaken for country clubs have sprouted nationwide. Many measure more than 15,000 square feet, or one-fourth the size of a national football league field.

In the Chicago area, builder Orren Pickell, 48, has been responsible for hundreds of the bigger homes. He recently published a compilation of them in a book, "Luxury Homes and Lifestyles" (The Ashley Group, \$39.95). He started in 1975, building much smaller 2,000-square-foot bi-level homes. By the early 1980s, his clients began requesting 3,500-square-foot houses to reflect their increased affluence and busier lifestyles.

Now his Bannockburn-based firm, Orren Pickell Designers & Builders, employs a



A 5,000-square-foot custom French country house in South Barrington (above) and a contemporary home with turrets in Long Grove that measures 6,959 square feet.

"WE OFTEN DESIGN A HUGE FOYER, HUGE OVAL DINING ROOM AND MAMMOTH LIVING ROOM."



staff of 100, designs and builds about 30 custom homes a year that average 6,000 square feet and cost \$1.6 million, and is starting to build more houses that are two and a half times that size and almost double the price.

Q: Tell us about making the transition to bigger houses.

A: At one time, a big, luxurious house measured 3,500 square feet to 4,000 square feet. Today, it's more in the vicinity of 5,000 or 6,000 square feet. We saw this change in the late 1980s. I've found that it's easier to design larger homes because they have bigger budgets and lots, include more rooms and have fewer constraints on what you can include.

Barbara Ballinger Buchholz writes frequently about design and interiors for the Magazine.

How big do your houses get?

We're doing two that will be 15,000 square feet each and two that are each 16,000 square feet. They will cost more than \$3 million, and that's excluding the property.

Why do clients want big houses?

The big difference in a house that's more normal at 3,500 square feet versus a 5,000-square-foot one is that you can give clients all the rooms they want, make them perfectly sized and have leftover space to be playful—with angles and odd shapes, for example. When it comes to the megahouse—those over 8,000 square feet—beauty is really in the eye of the beholder. I've tried to talk some clients out of them, but they like them for whatever reason—and maybe the status.

Are there more rooms or are the rooms larger?

Both. Rooms get larger in most of these big houses, and there are more rooms, many for very specialized functions. We often design a grand foyer, huge oval dining room, a mammoth living room that measures 18 by 28 feet and includes two or three seating areas, versus a more typical living room of 16 by 18 feet with one seating grouping. The specialized rooms include a library, family room, kitchen, "keeping room" for casual seating, sun room, media room, wine cellar, screened porch, workout room, laundry for multiple tasks, and indoor and outdoor swimming pools.

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Small

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always have a place to escape.

Any advice for people making the decision about what size space is right?

Examine the way you live. Someone who loves to cook and entertain probably wants a big kitchen. I advise: Think and then reduce. It's a lot like giving away clothing. Eliminate rooms you use least.

If you could own any type house in the future, what would it be?

It would be an important modern house such as a [Richard] Neutra [design] and wouldn't be big. It would be a great, small modern house. □

Large

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Which rooms have gotten larger and which smaller?

The family room and kitchen have gotten bigger and are often a combined space. Some owners are willing to eliminate the living room or downsize it to a smaller parlor.

We also are hearing that owners want not just big houses but ones with better finishes and materials.

That's right. Homeowners are asking for an incredible level of detail and finish in each room. We're talking about floors with patterns, ceilings with beams, cabinetry with fine millwork. We call the extras the "jewelry."

Do they use all these rooms or have them for show?

We encourage owners to include spaces only if they will use them 100 percent of the time, which is why we suggest eliminating living rooms and some dining rooms, which have become "quarterly rooms"—owners use them four times a year. Many owners have become more sensible about letting go, but others are afraid not to include certain rooms for resale.

What are some of the more unusual requests?

We've had clients ask for astronomically sized master suites measuring 20 by 30 feet, which make no sense because they're so big they don't make the occupants feel good and are hard to furnish. We ask how they plan to use that much space and if they want a separate area for reading or working out. If they do, we might suggest an adjacent room that can be closed for a more intimate feeling.

Many people criticize large houses on little lots. Is that a concern?

Yes, and more towns are enacting restrictions. You don't want to take away sunlight from your neighbors' home; you want to build the right size house that's commensurate with other houses in your neighborhood. I tell clients not to be impatient, wait for the right lot for the size house they want to build. I also tell them to downsize a bit and compromise.

Tell us about your own house. How big is it?

I've lived in the same house for 18 years. It started out at 4,500 square feet and has grown to 6,000 square feet because we added studios for me and my wife, Tina, a guest room, wine cellar and larger closet in the master bedroom. It fits the site since it's on five acres. We still have a child at home.

What trends do you see developing?

Smaller houses, but not really small—maybe 3,000 square feet—so owners have a manageable, functional house.

What has been your design inspiration?

I've really liked the large old homes in Newport, R.I. The designers of those houses knew how to use scale properly. □