



Home Design Trends

Today's home styles call for informal floor plans **BY RENEE BRINCKS**



When Sascha and Denise drew up renovation plans for their 1960s home near San Jose, California, they traded a maze of small rooms for an open-concept floor plan. Builders replaced several main-floor walls with steel structural supports, making space for a 14-foot-long kitchen island. The open room runs from the kitchen—which is divided from an airy living room by a breakfast bar—to a children’s play area. A desk tucked under a stairway fits beside the breakfast bar, accommodating family members as they finish homework, pay bills or catch up on emails. Glass doors near the end of the kitchen island fold back, connecting the kitchen with an outdoor dining area.

Sascha appreciates how the home’s design maximizes space and makes it easy for his

The floor plan developed for Sascha and Denise’s San Jose home includes an open dining room, a large kitchen island, a breakfast bar and glass doors that fold back to offer easy access to an outside dining area.



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family to spend time together. “You always know where everyone is, but it’s big and open enough that you still have your own space,” he says. “We didn’t want compartmentalized rooms or a formal dining area. That would just feel like wasted space.”

DEMAND FOR OPEN SPACES

Many homes designed by Cast Architecture, the Seattle firm that worked on Sascha and Denise’s home, receive the open-concept treatment. The demand for less-formal spaces dovetails with a trend toward making kitchens the center of household activity, explains firm principal Matt Hutchins. “Cooking is no longer an isolated activity. Today, it’s a social act, and everybody participates,” he says. “That also means kitchens are evolving to include fluid spaces for entertaining and interacting.”

Sascha and Denise’s open room is an example of one of today’s top trends in home design. Earlier this year, The American Institute of Architects (AIA) surveyed their members who predicted that in the next decade, technology will increasingly influence how homes operate, but functionality will still shape major design decisions. “We didn’t hear about robots or futuristic *Jetsons*-style innovations,” says Kermit Baker, chief economist for the AIA. “Instead, professionals anticipate design that’s driven by socioeconomic and demographic trends, such as an aging population and a decreased interest in formality.”

The trends include a continued larger role for the kitchen. Rather than tucking appliances away in closed-off quarters, architects are designing airy arrangements in which kitchens connect with versatile dining and living spaces.

URBAN SMALL SPACES

Another popular trend among homeowners is creating detached accessory dwelling units, also known as backyard

Recent home design trends include urban condominium buildings that feature large community spaces with open floor plans, and condos that offer

amenities and style in less space. Another trend is single-family homes that focus on connecting a property's indoor and outdoor elements.



Nexus building, Seattle.



Rowan building, San Francisco.

cottages or in-law units. Such a structure condenses the features of a traditional home into 500 to 800 square feet, and can be used as a vacation rental, a studio apartment or a living space for family members.

In some places, even smaller homes are popular. Take Portland's Simply Home Community, where neighbors reside in a cluster of cabins, each of which has less than 160 square feet of interior space. The residents of the community share a garden, divide chores among members and dine together in an adjacent main house.

While San Francisco's urban core lacks the space for such home structures, developers are applying small-space thinking to new multifamily construction. The San Francisco design firm Trumark Urban is completing the Rowan building, a 70-unit newcomer to the Mission District that is slated to open later this year. The project incorporates what Managing Director Arden Hearing calls an "affordability through design" approach. One-, two- and three-bedroom condos at Rowan range from 650 to 1,270 square feet in size.

LUXURY REBOUNDS

However, not all residents are embracing the small-space trend. At The Pacific, Trumark Urban's new luxury development in

San Francisco's Pacific Heights, penthouses can be as large as 4,000 square feet. The landmark, an East West Partners community in Denver, offers a 3,377-square-foot penthouse, as well as large two- and even three-bedroom condos. Bosa Development's Pacific Gate building, in downtown San Diego, will offer residences up to 2,608 feet in size, complete with upscale interior finishes, concierge services and a private boat-share program for residents.

Demand for larger luxury spaces is also increasing among some single-family homeowners. "Big homes are coming back faster than folks might have anticipated," says AIA's Baker. "At the upper end, that means bigger, more expensive homes with more features."

Those features often include home automation tools and energy-efficient elements, such as solar panels and water reclamation systems. AIA members see more requests for residential charging stations for electric vehicles, and strong demand for indoor-outdoor living spaces, which is part of the general trend toward informal, open living spaces, Baker says.

At KaMilo, a private community in the Mauna Lani Resort, on Hawai'i Island, the open-space trend helps homeowners capitalize on the climate and setting, complete



KaMilo, Hawai'i Island.



CONTAINER HOMES

As the tiny-home trend takes off, various firms across the globe are turning to the ubiquitous shipping container as the building block of choice for creating small and relatively inexpensive houses.

The Boulder, Colorado-based Rhino Cubed, shown above, uses containers that are available in four sizes between 20 and 40 feet long (all containers are 8 feet wide). The baseline "NakedTainer" starts at \$33,600 and includes insulation, finished floors and walls, roof trim, double-paned windows and a metal front door. Clients then customize the interior to their liking.

For a more spacious home, various firms, including San Jose-based Modulus, design stylish abodes made of multiple containers. The metal building blocks have also been used to create retail spaces, drive-through coffee stands and other business structures. —R.B.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ARTIST RENDERING; WEBER THOMPSON ARCHITECTS; ARTIST RENDERING; TRUMARK URBAN; BROOKFIELD RESIDENTIAL HAWAII; RHINO CUBED LLC; JW WAINOCUBED.COM



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with golf-course views and vistas that include distant island mountains. "Our most popular plans have rooms that easily flow from one into another, with large, open spaces connecting indoor and outdoor elements," says Egen Moe, vice president of sales and marketing for Brookfield Residential, the builder for KaMilo's new home community.

Similar open-space designs are found at the Toscana Country Club in Indian Wells, California, where large windows flood interior spaces with natural light, and the floor plans give the homes a modern, welcoming feel.

Indoor-outdoor components are also an important aspect of Seattle's Nexus, a 41-story condominium tower scheduled for completion in 2019. Rather than reserving the top floor for penthouse owners, developers are creating the rooftop-level Sky Club, with an exhibition kitchen and shared social spaces overlooking downtown Seattle. Residents will also have access to a fitness center, a media room, a pet lounge and co-working venues, along with a spacious room available for group events.

Dean Jones of Realogics Sotheby's International Realty, the team handling sales and marketing for the Nexus project, says designers will continue to explore new lifestyle-oriented common spaces, such as exhibition kitchens and private dining rooms. "You don't need to buy a second bedroom if you're not using it all year long. Buildings can respond to consumers' lifestyle demands by providing shared alternatives to those single-use attributes," Jones says.

The Nexus high-rise will go high-tech, he adds, with a custom smartphone app that makes it simple for residents to reserve those shared spaces.

"We're taking that idea of 'living in the cloud' and giving it new meaning," Jones says. ▲

Renee Brincks writes from San Francisco.