



Growing a Home: From Basic Needs to Dream House

By Ray Terrell

Economic restructuring, demographic shifts and lifestyle changes have greatly affected the profile of a home buyer in recent years. Because of those changes, designers and builders need to rethink what they offer.

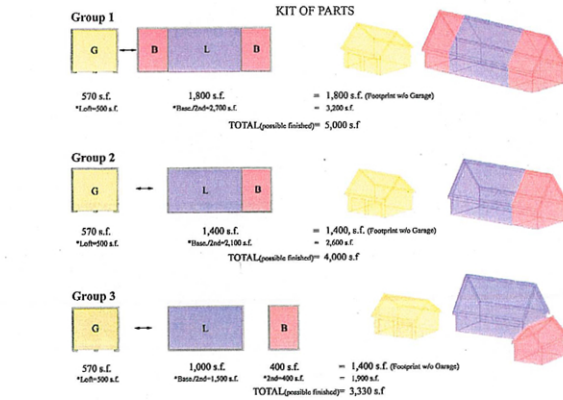
In the past, married couples were the most common buyers; for the most part, that meant couples expecting to fill a home with children or already toting a few kids. However, today, single buyers represent 31% of all home purchasers, which is a 5% increase over the last two years (according to statistics from the National Association of Realtors). They are also, in many cases, younger than in years past, and the majority are female.

This means the demand for smaller homes at moderate costs has skyrocketed. However, buyers are less likely to stay in their smaller homes as family situations change. That is, unless their homes can change with those situations.

One result of these new realities is what we call the "grow home." Like the computer industry's approach to tiered software packages, grow homes allow both the perimeter and the interior of a house to be expanded and changed to fit the space needs and budgets of owners over time. When done well, the resulting home gives owners what they need, when they need it, at an affordable price and with no need to move — ever.

DESIGN THE WHOLE HOME BUT BUILD FOR NEED

A grow home requires vision and long-term planning. But designed well, the home is easily adaptable, allowing for view corridors, circulation paths, landscaping and living spaces to be



maintained through all phases of growth and change.

One approach to organized phasing of a grow home is to develop a "kit of parts," a detailed list of everything the owner could desire over time, such as a pool, a wine cellar, a larger kitchen, a nursery — and leaving some flexibility for unseen needs such as an in-law apartment. The kit starts with the essentials, which can be arranged in a variety of layouts and sizes, then adds options in phases, usually on the commonly used 2-foot grid. For example, phase one may contain the living room, kitchen, full bath, bedroom and breakfast nook, all developed from a kit of modular parts based on the grid. Phase two could include the addition of a second bedroom, full bath and mudroom. Because of the grid system, the parts within the kit work together in an organized fashion, require less waste of raw materials and save on design costs.

For the most cost-conscious of buyers, some of the kit's parts can be pre-manufactured off-site. With no concern for construction delays due to weather, this method lessens construction time and tends to be less expensive because the pre-manufactured parts are based on quantity and repetition.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The opportunity for phasing is endless, as long as the site and financial situation of the homeowners allow changes. Traditional and contemporary designs are both good fits for the grow home concept. The gable ends of more traditional homes can easily be added and finished off in a way that makes the modularity of the home disappear. Contemporary homes with boxy volumes can blend phases flawlessly without a trace of what was first or last.

Another consideration when planning

2 | DALLAS/FORT WORTH BUILDER/ARCHITECT SEPTEMBER 2007

a grow home is to limit disruption to the homeowner during add-on phases. One way to do this is by initially designing the home so each new phase is as far from the essential living space as possible. This way, the kitchen, bedroom and bath can be left untouched and relatively undisturbed, so there is no need to find a temporary living space (or eat takeout for months) while the addition is being constructed.

Adding frills to the kit of parts is an opportunity to bring even more value to the home. For example, pre-wiring the home for solar panels would cost approximately \$300 initially, but would triple in cost if the owner decided to add this feature after initial construction. It is also smart to pre-wire for items such as cable outlets, speakers or basement rooms that may become a home theater or fitness room, as well as any other electrical needs that

are part of future plans. The same applies for pre-planning plumbing needs for a second or third bathroom, wet bars or anything else that might need to be fitted. Saving time and money is one benefit; not having to rip out finished walls and floors to accomplish growth down the road is another.

SUSTAINABLE EFFORT

Comfort, cost and consistency are tangible benefits to homeowners, but grow homes also benefit the greater community. Because of the nature of the design, Styrofoam insulated panels (SIPs) can easily be used instead of traditional framing and roofing materials. These materials are more expensive in the beginning, but have a significant return on investment due to better insulation values and lower labor costs. They also make for a more sustainable

home.

Best of all, smart design and material selection will allow a whole new wave of home owners to live exactly the way they want — reflecting not only their changing lifestyles, but also a commitment to the environment. This sustainable concept encourages people to stay in one home over time, not only saving the homeowner money and headaches (as in — no moving costs or hassle), but also allowing them to fully embrace the relationships they create with neighbors and the community where they live.

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