



Fall to-dos: Homeowners opt for open floor plans, one-level living

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Homeowners in 2016 are looking for open floor plans and favoring one-level living, according to Laura Orfield-Skrivseth, owner of Orfield Design and Construction, Inc. in Minnetonka.

“They like an entryway with a mudroom, plus pantries, washer and dryer on the main level, and lots of closet space,” Orfield-Skrivseth said.

Hardwood floors are very popular everywhere, including the kitchen, she said.

Kitchen-wise, many homeowners prefer peninsula seating or a sit-down table to accommodate a minimum of six people, with the living area immediately adjacent. “The ability to use the space for daily functions and incorporate a large number of people in the same space is really important,” Orfield-Skrivseth said.

“The independent, secluded formal dining room has gone away,” she said. “People are deciding that redundancy in space is not as important as relationships.”

Bathrooms are more functional, according to Orfield-Skrivseth. “People want linen closets inside the bathroom,” she said.

And because it’s Minnesota, attached garages are more popular than freestanding garages, she said.

Curb appeal is also on many homeowners’ radar screens, beginning with the front entryway, the overhang, shutters, window boxes, plantings, landscaping and fencing, according to Orfield-Skrivseth. “A good coat of paint does a world of wonder.”

“Window replacements are huge, and they’re so much more energy efficient now,” she said. “New windows are tight, they look better and they’re maintenance free.”

Screen porches are morphing into two- to three-season porches that can be heated or cooled with freestanding gas fireplace or a ceiling fan. “Once you’re past a two- or three-season porch, you’ve added a room onto your house,” she said.

More and more, people who like their neighborhood, their relationships and proximity to work and school are finding that it may be less expensive and less of a hassle to stay where they are and make their home into something they enjoy, Orfield-Skrivseth said, adding, “It automatically raises the resale value.”

Most products these days automatically are energy-efficient because the industry is so aware of the impact on the environment, according to Orfield-Skrivseth. “Now it’s taken for granted,” she said. Recent revamping of building and energy codes has brought more people into compliance across the industry, so that it has to be less of an intentional decision on the part of clients, she said.

As a licensed building contractor as well as designer and builder, Orfield-Skrivseth said much of her firm’s work is remodels. “Within existing spaces, people are gutting rooms – or the entire house. They’re lifting the roof off and up, adding spaces off the back. It’s just so exciting.”

In addition, she said, some people are interested in adding wine cellars, entertainment rooms and movie theaters, “all sorts of grand things.”

Almost anyone with any size budget can satisfy some of the items on their wish list, Orfield-Skrivseth said.

“You can do a deep soaking tub on a budget,” she said. “They’re not just for the rich and famous.”

Teri Johnson, a designer and one of the owners of J Brothers Home Improvements in Maple Grove, agreed that the master bath is an area many people want to remodel. “We’re removing the large whirlpool tubs that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s,” she said. “We remove 85 percent of tubs altogether. People are opting for larger showers. In the 15 percent of cases where we add a tub, it’s usually a freestanding deep soaking tub with no bubbles.”

Regarding kitchens, Johnson said her clients are looking for ways to make that room more functional for family lifestyles. “They want to open up the kitchen,” she said. “Some are removing the dining room to make the kitchen larger and provide more island space. Seventy-five percent do a cooktop and built-in oven with microwave/convection oven.”

Johnson also finds that people want a lot of windows in the kitchen.

In almost all cases, she said, clients want soffits removed and kitchen cabinets extended to the ceiling.

“Some people are very sure of exactly what they want and what the kitchen is missing,” Johnson said. “When they can’t narrow it down, we refer them to houzz.com, where they are able to find ideas that are really helpful.”

In the living room, many people want an existing fireplace wall moved down lower with no hearth above. TV flat screens typically are installed above the fireplace, she said.

Some clients still are interested in maintenance-free decks, according to Johnson. “It’s a matter of composition,” she said. Balusters are aluminum, instead of wooden spindles.

Porches that function from early spring to late fall are popular. “Some people use a window system with screens or windows that are locked into place,” she said. “But they’re not for winter use.”

People who are anticipating remodeling usually meet with Johnson first to see how realistic their budget is, she said. “Most people grasp the idea of how much things cost,” she said.

Even if they’re thinking of selling a home at sometime in the future, many homeowners opt to make improvements now, so they can enjoy the changes, Johnson said. However, most of her clients are planning to stay in their homes, she said. “Most Maple Grove homes were built in the 1980s and 1990s, so it’s time for them to be updated,” Johnson said.

Once the remodeling process begins, Johnson said, her firm’s crews are onsite every day until the work is done. “We’ve done many remodels,” she said. “We try to make it as painless as possible.”

Nate Carlson, a project developer with Highmark Builders in Burnsville, said his firm works on eight or nine new homes a year, all with prices starting at \$900,000.

“We’re working on a pretty large 15-foot by 10-foot walk-in wine cellar now, he said. “It’s fully temperature controlled and holds between 1,500 and 2,000 bottles.”

His firm also is doing a lot with “very interesting” tiles. “You can do anything you want with any possibility,” Carlson said.

His firm also has installed “tons of pools” and screen porches. “Many clients like to live on their porches, and on patios,” he said.



Before and after pictures from Orfield Design and Construction, Inc. in Minnetonka, show what can be done to brighten and open up a kitchen. (Submitted photos)



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