

REPELLING THE TALENT POACHERS

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L-SHAPED GREAT ROOMS

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THE GREAT ROOM GROWS UP

Architects and designers see more L-shaped great rooms, more spatial definition, and a stronger connection to the outdoors.

By Susan Bady, Senior Contributing Editor

In some ways, the great room hasn't changed. It's still the part of the home that brings the family together—where everyone gathers to talk, eat, read, watch television, listen to music, and relax. However, the linear configuration popular in great rooms before the housing crash is giving way to new forms and uses.

Rick Garza, principal of RPGA Design Group, Fort Worth, Texas, says that for many years the great room, breakfast area, and kitchen were all open to each other and essentially part of the same space.

"Today, depending on the actual demographic of the [homeowners], great rooms are evolving to gain more definition of these spaces while still maintaining a connected relationship," Garza says. For example, large, arched openings with tall ceilings from the front door to the back porch convey openness while delineating specific uses.

Jerry Gloss, principal of KGA Studio Architects in Louisville, Colo., declares, "The L shape is the new shape." In a home that KGA recently designed for a move-down buyer, "the linchpin is the kitchen, and the L forms around an outdoor space. It's the only dining space in the whole house, but it's a grand room. It feels big even though it's a 2,600-square-foot ranch."

Irvine, Calif., architect Robert Hidey says his firm no longer designs formal living rooms, though there are still formal dining rooms from time to time. As Gloss puts it, "The formal dining room is the only ceremonial room left."

"The great room sort of made formal living a thing of the

past, [though] more recently it has started to reappear in the form of a parlor or library," Garza adds.

Even in regions where the weather can get chilly, it's become increasingly common to extend the great room to an outdoor living area such as a loggia or summer kitchen. In some homes, the kitchen can be closed off from the great room to muffle the sounds of food preparation and cleanup. Another variation that Garza has seen is a smaller, more intimate version of the great room called the warming room or hearth room.

CHANGING AND RE-ARRANGING

In years past, the great room might be adjacent to the kitchen, separated by columns, hallways, and walls. While it was designed for entertaining, guests had a tendency to congregate in the kitchen. Now the great room is integral to both the dining room and kitchen, with an emphasis on functionality rather than formality. Eliminating hallways frees up livable (and furnishable) space.

The size and importance of the kitchen varies according to geographic location, Hidey says. For instance, while a large kitchen is very desirable in California, it's a secondary consideration in Texas. But to Hidey, a great room isn't a great room unless it has a great kitchen with a large island. "Islands are getting larger and larger," he notes. "I don't think we can really do an island that's big enough." He's designed islands as long as 14 feet with seating for up to seven people.

Large media walls are always associated with great rooms.



The L shape is the new shape of great rooms nowadays, where the dining room and great room pivot around the kitchen. All three spaces wrap around a loggia. Kitchen islands are getting bigger, says architect Robert Hidey; this one seats six.

BUILDER: THE NEW HOME COMPANY; ARCHITECT: ROBERT HIDEY ARCHITECTS; ILLUSTRATION: ROBERT HIDEY ARCHITECTS; PHOTOS: CHRIS MAIER

“It’s kind of challenging where there aren’t many solid walls,” he says. “Often we find ourselves with just one wall where we can place a television.” In such cases, the fireplace (another popular great-room feature) may be moved outside. There may even be a second TV mounted outdoors.

When outdoor rooms are connected to great rooms, it’s important to provide extra circulation space so that people don’t have to navigate around “floating” furniture to get outside, Hidey says.

In addition to fireplaces, media walls, and built-in bookshelves, great rooms may include such features as wet bars and command centers where homeowners can attend to the day-to-day tasks of running the household. Garza once designed a great room with a wall that opens to a hidden room, and a combination great room/library with an elevated walkway for the upper-level bookshelves.

In more upscale homes, spaces such as catering kitchens and children’s play areas are often integrated into the great room, Hidey says. “New demands are placed on floor plans as the informal living areas become more important,” he says.

SIZING IT UP

Great rooms are typically in proportion to the size of the home, Garza says. A 3,000-square-foot home might have a 15-by-22-foot, rectangular great room. In larger homes, the great room might be 19 by 27 feet. Hidey has designed great rooms that are as large as 25 by 30 feet.

However, great rooms don’t have to be gigantic to work well, notes Richard Handlen, principal of EDI International, Larkspur, Calif. For one community, EDI designed a 14-by-14-foot living room that feels larger because it borrows space from the kitchen, dining room, and stair hall.

When square footage is at a premium, the best approach is to eliminate the formal dining room in favor of a combined great room, dining area, and kitchen. While it can be a challenge to allocate enough space for a great room in smaller homes, “Sometimes it’s better to elevate the quality of the rooms you have than increase the quantity,” Garza says. **PB**

FIVE GREAT ROOM TRENDS

1. They’re L-shaped rather than linear.
2. They’re connected to an outdoor space such as a loggia or summer kitchen.
3. The kitchen, dining area, and great room are open to each other, but the individual spaces are more defined.
4. Kitchens typically have large islands with seating for as many as seven people.
5. There may be a secondary room off the great room called the warming room or hearth room.

[GREAT ROOM]



This kitchen is more of an alcove than a separate room, opening to the high ceilings of the dining and living area. In this example, the fireplace and TV set share a wall.



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BUILDER/DESIGNER: FRANKEL BUILDING GROUP; PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY OF FRANKEL BUILDING GROUP



BUILDER: CATALDO BUILDERS; ARCHITECT: WISE SURMA JONES; ILLUSTRATION: WISE SURMA JONES

To facilitate entertaining, this kitchen, breakfast room, and great room open to a large veranda and summer kitchen.

Floor space on the main level of this home is almost entirely devoted to the kitchen, dining room, and living room. The screen porch shares a fireplace with the living room, making it usable year-round. All of the spaces access an extensive deck system.

BUILDER: CLARUM HOMES; ARCHITECT: EDI INTERNATIONAL; PHOTO: MERT CARPENTER



Architect Richard Handlen observes that the snack bar in this kitchen allows family and visitors to talk with the cook while looking over his/her shoulder to watch TV. No one has to walk in front of the TV to circulate through the room because the entertainment zone is at one end of the "L." There's also access to the outdoors.

Large windows open to a side yard, flooding this great room with light. Traffic flows easily through the island kitchen and around the dining-room table.



BUILDER: BROOKFIELD HOMES; ARCHITECT: STARCK ARCHITECTURE; ILLUSTRATION: STARCK ARCHITECTURE; PHOTO: BROOKFIELD HOMES



BUILDER: PLATINUM HOMES; ARCHITECT: GIESEN DESIGN STUDIO; ILLUSTRATION: GIESEN DESIGN STUDIO

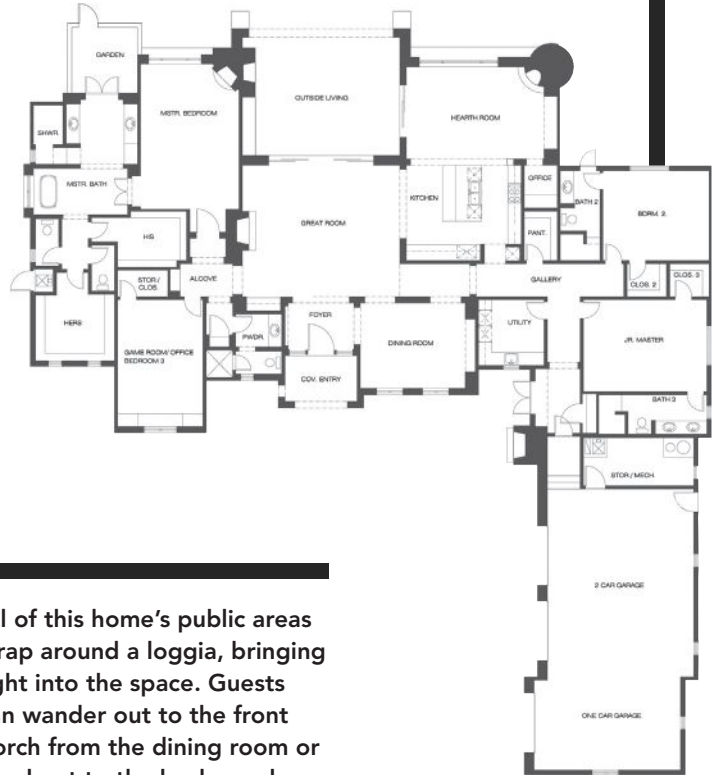
Designed for move-ups in need of more elbow room, this 3,149-square-foot home focuses the kitchen, nook, and grand room toward the rear patio. The media wall shares space with the fireplace.



design

Here is a layout that makes circulating from the living area to the nook and kitchen and out to the covered patio an easy trip for party guests.

Here the great room makes a grand statement at the front door, opening to an expansive outdoor space. A hearth room off the kitchen serves as a more intimate gathering place.



All of this home's public areas wrap around a loggia, bringing light into the space. Guests can wander out to the front porch from the dining room or head out to the back porch.



This plan has a warming room—sometimes called a hearth room—adjacent to the breakfast nook. Half walls define the dining room without completely separating it from the great room.

