

Activity Rooms

Designing your home to include space for the fun things in life.

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Architecture is not simply about floor plans and appearance. It's about living, about self-care, about enjoyment. One of the most important questions to ask as you begin to design your new log home is, "How do you use a home for your favourite activities?"

Think about your family's unique personalities. What hobbies do you really love to do in and around your home? Take the time to look at your lifestyle and that of each household member. How does your present home support that? What works and what doesn't? How might you want to change things in your new home? What will remain the same?

Make a list that reflects how each of your family members enjoys their hobbies. Consider traditional activities such as playing cards, putting together puzzles, shooting pool, building models or canning tomatoes. Look at playing music or exercising, either individually or in a group. Quilting, painting, fly-tying, furniture restoration or other hobbies may fill your list. It should cover all household members. How are pets a part of your life? Your list should look at your present needs as well as how they will change 10 to 20 years from now.

The nature of the activities determines how they get woven into your plan. You may find that some activities are better done away from or adjacent to the primary living areas. Also consider where you need a separate room where the door can be closed on excessive noise or a mess, where unfinished projects can be left undisturbed. Would an alcove be sufficient where a curtain can be drawn? How about a table beside the main conversation area? Don't forget about the space in the loft overlooking it all.

Think beyond sitting, eating and sleeping rooms. What sorts of spaces would turn your home from ordinary into a hub of activity? The possibilities are, of course, as diverse as your family.

There are no fixed rules. Decisions will be based on mutual needs. While one family may prefer to have the children's activities separated because of messiness and noise, another may prefer to keep children close at hand to facilitate supervision and interaction. One couple may prefer "his and her" libraries or hobby rooms; another will choose to share one larger space.

Making Space

You may very well find your list of activities suggest a house size beyond your means. Balance your budget with your household needs. Imagine how spaces might be integrated. Which activities require their own rooms? Which can be channeled into a multi-use area or an activity center adjacent another living space? How flexible can the spaces be? How can they serve different purposes at different times?

For example, can the desk in the kitchen that's usually a bill-paying center also be used for tying flies or other crafts? Can a space be modified as the age or condition of household members change? Can the toddler's play area next to the living room become homework room for school-age children?

Look at how primary living spaces might incorporate various activities. We all too frequently hear stories of formal dining or living rooms that go unused, while smaller eating nooks or family rooms are never empty. Can your new great room accommodate a variety of active pursuits? Can you incorporate a reading alcove or a nook with a built-in table and benches for playing cards? What about that often under-used loft? Can it double as a hobby space, studio or play area?

You may be happily surprised that many activities don't need a lot of physical space and will be pursued more regularly if users feel part of the 'action', not tucked away in a basement. There are many ways to tie activity spaces into primary living areas in the design of your home by simply incorporating a nearby alcove or nook, an under stair cranny or a window bay.

If homes are to really live, they need to support all household members in the pursuit of their unique activities. A well designed home can make that possible.

Solo or Group Act

Can you picture a household where one child plays the piano, while nearby another works on a school craft project? Not too far away, tonight's cook puts the finishing touches on dinner while the clean-up crew shoots a game of pool. Proximity allows informal interaction so that the equally important needs for independence and relationship can be fostered. This sort of interaction can be inadvertently lost in a poorly planned house.

At the same time, some activities are best pursued in specially designated spaces. A game room may fit that description. Nevertheless, you need to consider how such a room relates the remainder of the house. Does it need visual or acoustic separation? How close should it be to primary living area or bedrooms? Should it have a door to the exterior? What are the space requirements for various games and activities, and how can they overlap?

Does the room need a refrigerator or wet bar? How much and what kind of storage does it require? Remember that more storage is better than less, as games and equipment tend to accumulate, not diminish. If the room is large, a higher than normal ceiling will maintain a sense of proportion and create an inviting space.

We all love to pursue a wide variety of activities. Create your own list, then begin the intriguing task of integrating those activities into your home plan. Do so without adding unnecessary floor area and you are well on the way to designing a livable home that

incorporates plenty of space for family activities. Think long range, use space wisely and get ready to enjoy an active log house.

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