

# Welcomed By Design

## *Creating a well-planned bed and breakfast*

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Imagine inviting a group of strangers to come to your home and stay for the night! For some homeowners, it is their worst nightmare. For others, it's a delightful opportunity to reach out to others, share experiences and make a little extra money. If you'd like to use your home as a bed and breakfast, there are many design issues to consider.

The process of designing a Bed and Breakfast (B&B) is not so different from designing your home. You start by asking yourself and your family a lot of questions. What is our lifestyle? How much do we wish to spend? How might our needs change over the years? Is a B&B allowed under the current zoning of our property? (While many residential zonings support B&Bs of a limited number of bedrooms, be sure to review your local restrictions before you begin on your design journey.)

A host of other questions then follow. The first relate to your overall purpose in opening a B&B. What customers you are trying to attract? What image are you trying to convey? While, in the eyes of most guests, the individual rooms take precedence over the overall property, you will define your guests' experience.

Do everything to make your B&B a reflection of your personality. Your log home should be the ultimate place you would like to visit. The ambience you will create is a combination of character, mood and atmosphere. Communicate that clearly and simply. Keep in mind that the typical B&B guest is seeking gracious, quiet elegance and character, whether rustic or formal. They tend to be middle-aged, leisure-oriented and spend more than the typical traveler. Above all, they seek attention to detail and relish personal touches.

### **The Specifics**

Zoning issues aside, how many guest bedrooms do you want? How many guests do you feel you can adequately service? Will extra rooms mean other requirements within your home? What are the financial implications? If you want more bedrooms than current zoning allows, what is the procedure and likelihood of rezoning your property? I know someone who designed and built a B&B with eight guestrooms. Only it turned out, he was legally allowed less than half of that. Fortunately for him, though not without considerable debate, he was able to have the zoning changed in order to accommodate him. Otherwise, it could have been a very costly venture. If you want to have planning officials sympathetic to your rezoning application it is generally better to bring them into the picture before the fact rather than after.

Include in your initial review a look at the local health regulations. There may be specific requirements for kitchens including the need for a separate washroom. Do you plan to be barrier-free, accessible by those with handicaps?

## **The Floor Plan**

Once these overall questions have been addressed, ask questions that will help define your floor plan. Privacy is perhaps the most important issue. Do you have children or teenagers? How will your family influence the guests' experience, or conversely, how will your kids' feel about strangers in through their living room? How can you separate the public guest areas from your private family areas? While you may be able to locate all the guest rooms on one wing, what about social and eating areas? Do you want the guests to socialize in your living room and dine in your dining room, or do you want to design a separate lounge and dining room. What would the additional cost be? If you are primarily going to be entertaining guests on weekends only, then maybe you do not need to have separate rooms.

The average stay of a B&B user is two or three nights, however your specific location will influence your actual use patterns. Is your B&B itself going to be the focus of your guests' visits? Or will it be primarily a place for visitors to sleep and have breakfast? While the most common interests of the average B&B user are antiquing, golfing, biking and visiting spas and historic sites, your location will likely govern your specific market.

Your community will have its own unique personality and geography. The intentions of your guests will influence your amenities and the extent of common rooms you provide.

Log homes, by their very nature, will likely inspire visitors to hang around and enjoy the ambience. Therefore you may consider your private area as a separate suite with its own small living and dining space. When there are no guests you can have the run of the rest of your home. While you have visitors, you have the option of privacy.

Separate log cabins for guests are wonderful but would be more expensive than guestrooms within your house. You would likely have to charge a higher rate to make this economical. It must also be consistent with the demographics of your potential visitors.

Amenities are also a function of what type of services you want to provide guests. A perennial favorite at rural B&Bs is the outdoor hot tub or spa. Set on a comfortable deck, guests can really have a relaxing getaway. Another favorite is the fireplace. There is nothing like curling up in a log home by the fireplace with a good book, or sipping a glass of wine while getting to know the owners or other guests. The more rustic the experience the better. Create lots of nooks as well as more generous spaces.

### **Attention to Detail**

First impressions are always crucial: Carefully consider all details, from your B&B's outdoor signage to its landscaping, exterior lighting, parking and entrance paths. Your entry should be welcoming and set a tone for the visit. This includes not only its relationship to the interior spaces but its flooring, color, lighting, furniture and so on. Throughout your home, wood flooring is beautiful but also noisy. You can use area rugs in all rooms and runners in the hallways.

Your décor should be an expression of you, but consider your own idiosyncrasies and avoid inappropriate décor.

Bedrooms are the place you can really invoke creative design. Before you consider the details, you need to decide how many guestrooms will have their own bathroom. If guests will have to share a bath, consider putting a small sink and wash stand in the bedrooms.

In the bedrooms, freestanding armoires feel more personal than closets and augment the rustic décor. Use queen-sized or king-sized beds with large headboards. In some rooms provide a sitting area with a day bed. You may even consider a small fireplace. Window seats are popular.

Log furniture is usually a hit, but make sure it is also very comfortable. Include a large over-the-dresser tilting mirror and a small tabletop mirror. Add softness with drapes and tablecloths. You can choose different color carpets and wall colors for different rooms. You may be able to use a common accent color that runs through all rooms so you can use one color for towels and tissues. Use natural colors, fabrics and textures for all furnishings and window coverings.

Carefully review all your mechanical and electrical needs. Pay attention to both sound and energy conservation. Will guests be able to control the temperature of their room or evoke different moods through carefully planned lighting? Soundproof your floors and walls.

In bathrooms, I suggest using a pedestal sink instead of a full vanity, or install the sink in an antique dresser. Place a small washstand beside the sink for toiletry items. Most adults prefer to shower, but many enjoy the romance of the large whirlpool tub. Use low flush toilets. Provide task, general and accent lighting, along with ample ventilation. Consider the amount of bathroom cleaning that will be required and choose your finishes and fixtures carefully. If your bathrooms are far from the hot water tank, install a re-circulating pump and insulate the hot water lines.

Decide whether you want to put phones in the guestrooms, or have a common phone for guests. You will need expanded laundry facilities with a heavy-duty washing machine and an extra dryer, as well as extra storage, preferably close to the kitchen and office. Choose appliances for their energy efficiency.

You may need only minor alterations to your kitchen. Remember, you are only serving breakfast. You may want some space for additional food storage. Decide how meals are going to be served and where. If you will be serving part of your breakfast buffet-style, a generous sideboard may be a good idea.

Outside, review your overall landscaping intentions. Do you wish to emphasize wide-open spaces or create nooks and opportunities for intimacy? Keep your landscaping low-maintenance.

More Resources for Future Innkeepers: To assist your planning process, the following resources may be helpful:

How to open and Operate a Bed & Breakfast—Jan Stankus

Complete Guide to Bed and Breakfasts (Part of the Lanier Guides)— Pamela Lanier

So... You Want To Be An Innkeeper—Davis, Hardy, Bell and Brown

PAII Bed & Breakfast/Country Inn Industry Survey—National Edition (expensive but comprehensive information)--Professional Association of Innkeepers International

How to Start and Operate Your Own Bed & Breakfast Inn—Martha Watson Murphy

Open Your Own Bed and Breakfast—Barbara Notarius

How to Start and Run Your Bed & Breakfast Inn—Ripley Hotch and Carl Glasman

Obviously, there are numerous details to consider when designing a B&B. For more information, look for newsletters published by regional and national B&B associations, or the books listed at left. You'll also find plenty of books online.

Designing and operating a log Bed and Breakfast is both exciting and challenging. Thorough planning and innovative design will go a long way in ensuring the success of your venture.