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By answering some basic questions about your life, your future, your finances and your family, you can begin finding the perfect floor plan for your dream home.

Here are several factors to keep in mind when looking for a perfect floor plan:

### **Chart Your Lifestyle**

Consider the makeup of your family (adults only, adults and kids, aging parents), how you live (formal or casual, hectic or relaxed) and if you like to entertain or have special hobbies.

A lifestyle outline will tell you how you feel about your home and help you develop the basic plan.

For example, a casual couple won't need a formal entry or dining room, whereas high-octane families should consider cozy, peaceful spaces to regroup.

### **Size Things Up**

Bigger isn't always better. It does, however, cost more. So before you jump on the wasted-space bandwagon, make sure the number, type and size of rooms reflect what will take place within them.

To do this, think of your rooms in terms of activities. For example, instead of "kitchen" and "living room," think "cooking" and "family time."

Organize your list of activities into a house based on how you'll use each room.

Start by breaking down your list into private and communal activities and where in the house each one should take place.

Then draw a bubble diagram by grouping bubbles (rooms) according to where you want them to be positioned. Finally, square off the bubbles to create a rough floorplan, adding enough space for walls.

### **Learn to Compromise**

Balancing size, quality and budget is essential, and unless you have unlimited resources, the reality is you can't always get everything you want.

So make cuts that work for your lifestyle, whether it's shaving off square footage or minimizing special features. Be careful on reducing quality, there are some things you shouldn't skimp on, including windows and doors.

Also consider looking into additional financial resources.

### **Show, Don't Tell**

Convey your ideas to your designer and builder with a notebook of clippings (or scans burned to a CD) of homes and features that speak to you.

This will give the professionals an idea of what you want your home to look like and an indication of the quality you expect.

### **Site Your Home**

Take note of the advantages and challenges of your building site, including geography, topography, vegetation, climate, sun and wind exposure, views and sounds. Then determine how these factors will affect each room.

Also think about how your home impacts the beauty of the site, and consider leaving the best attributes untouched so you can enjoy them.

### **Visualize Your House**

Imagine yourself living in each room of your home. How will it look and feel? What will you see in front, behind, above and below? What sounds will you hear?

### **Choose Your Style**

The beauty of a timber home is that it can be built in virtually any style. Be sure to think through how you want the interior and exterior to look before you design the first room.

### **Look to the Future**

Look at your needs now and in the future.

How old are your children? Will they become teens soon? Will they want a more private room with its own bathroom?

What happens when they are all out of the house?

Answer these questions and figure out secondary uses for rooms upon your changing lifestyle. If you are just starting a family, you will want the rooms of the children close to the master bedroom, but a future guest room next to the master bedroom may not be to your liking.

Look at what space you need now and in the future.

### **The Great Outdoors**

Look at how much time you spend outdoors or particular hobbies that are done outdoors.

This should be considered in the scheme of a floor plan.

If you entertain outside often, a large deck and/or patio would be wise.

If you hunt or fish and come in from your excursions with muddy boots, an entryway that would allow for quick clean-up may want to be added to your floor plan.

### **Stay Focused**

Professional guidance and recommendations are crucial throughout the entire home-building process. Remember, this is your home, so make sure you discuss every suggestion thoroughly, and don't be afraid to get a second opinion if you have concerns.

Also, you want to work with someone who's excited about your plan and not trying to make a statement of his own, or worse, make his job easier.