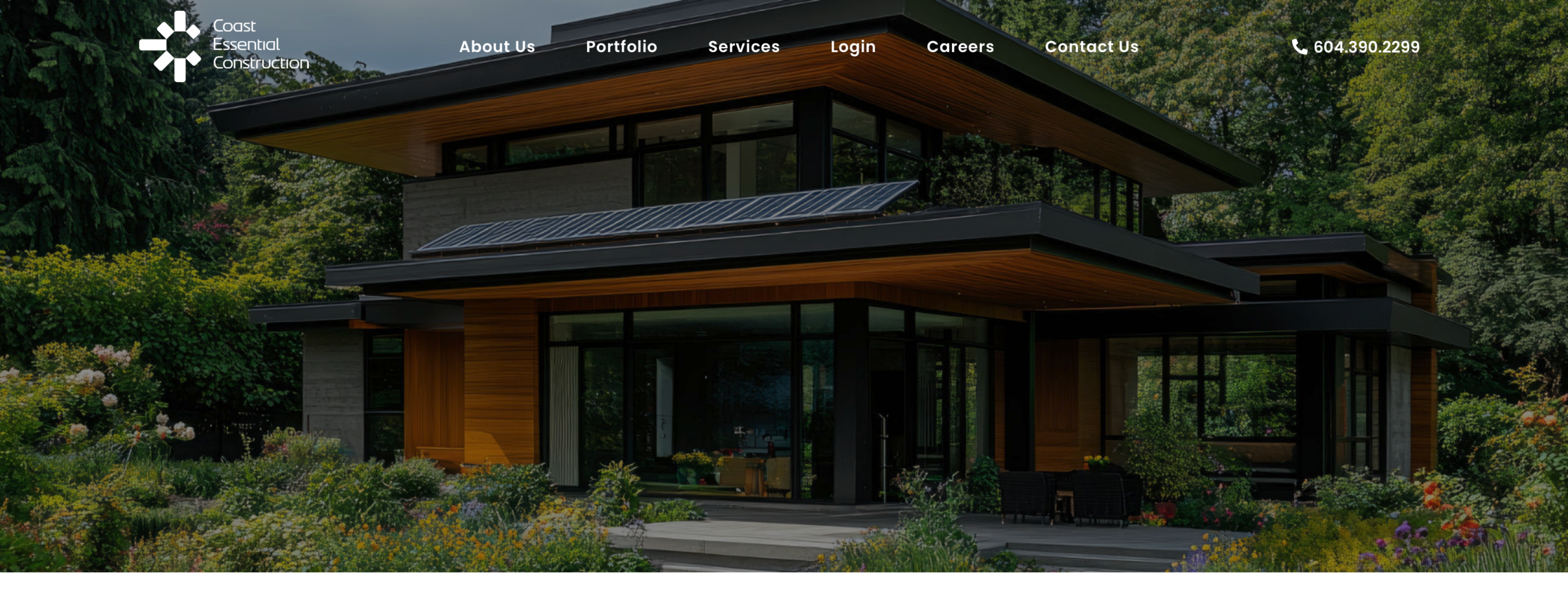




Designing with Purpose: A Guide to Identifying Your New Home's Key Features

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Designing a custom home should be an exciting journey that allows you to create a living space tailored to your family's unique needs, lifestyle, and aesthetic preferences. However, as many homeowners quickly discover, with so many decisions to make, it can become overwhelming.

It's important to establish clear priorities with your architect or designer and builder from the outset. Often these professionals will help balance your vision with practicality, by suggesting cost-effective alternatives that achieve similar results.

In this guide, we'll share some insights into what matters most when designing your custom home, offering key considerations for setting the right priorities, so you can end up with the home of your dreams.

Defining your lifestyle and needs

Before diving into architectural plans, features and material selections, take some time to evaluate how you live in your current home and how you envision living in your new home. What are your daily routines? Does your lifestyle require a home office or quiet study area? Will your family be spending more time in the kitchen? Do you need a mudroom to simplify the organization of outdoor apparel and footwear, and keep clutter contained?

Will your family size or dynamics change over the next five to ten years? Do you have a growing family and young children, or are you an empty nester with plans to age in place? Will this be your forever home? How many bedrooms and bathrooms do you need now; and how many will you need five years from now?

Do you need flex spaces to accommodate aging parents in the future if the need arises? Is a 'build up' or "build out' addition part of the long-term strategy, and something you need to consider as you look for land, and look into the local zoning and bylaws?

Your new home should accommodate your existing passions and entertainment needs. Are you a gourmet cook, a wine collector, a fitness enthusiast, or an artist? Do you need a soundproof room for weekly jam sessions? If you frequently host gatherings, you may require a spacious kitchen, an open floor plan, an outdoor entertainment area or a home theatre.

Choosing the right location and orientation: Your home's location influences everything from your daily commute to the property's long-term value. Proximity to work, schools and amenities enhance your lifestyle, but they also affect the resale value.

A scenic lot should also offer the correct orientation for your building to take advantage of the views. East-facing windows take in direct morning sunlight and cooler afternoon shading. They provide bright morning sunlight and warmth while minimizing heat gain during the afternoon. South-facing solar panel systems almost always generate the most electricity, but east-west roofs can work well for solar power as well.

Functionality and flow: A well-designed custom home balances beauty with functionality. Bedrooms should be located in quiet areas, while living places should facilitate natural flow, supporting your daily routines; and kitchens are usually placed near the dining area for convenience.

Open floor plans are popular today, creating a sense of spaciousness while encouraging interaction between rooms. However, your family may prefer defined rooms for privacy and controlling noise. Unnecessary foot traffic can be minimized by positioning hallways and passages strategically. Layouts where people must pass through one room to access another should be avoided.

Position living areas to maximize the natural light and views, for a healthier and more inviting environment. Be sure to incorporate large windows or skylights in key areas to enhance ambiance and your home's energy efficiency.

Walk-in closets, built-in shelving, and a well-organized pantry will enhance convenience and manage clutter. Remember to include some creative storage solutions like built-in cabinets or under-stair storage to maximize your available space.

Design multi-functional spaces that can adapt to your family's changing needs, offering future flexibility. Guest rooms can double as offices or basements can transition into family rooms or recreation areas.

Consider how your home might be used in the future to ensure it will remain functional and marketable over time. If you anticipate aging in place or taking in aging parents at some point, consider adaptable design elements such as wider doorways, open layouts, or spaces that can evolve with family needs.

Architectural style and aesthetic preferences: Your home's architectural style should reflect your personality and taste, and this could affect the neighbourhood you decide to build in. Having a clear vision will help guide your design decisions, whether you prefer modern minimalism, traditional elegance, or something more eclectic or expressionist. Your architect and interior designer should be able to help you refine your vision while ensuring a cohesive design.

On the exterior, the roofing, siding, and landscaping play a big role in developing the curb appeal. To achieve interior cohesion, select a colour palette, flooring, and finishes that will create a harmonious look. Durable, high-quality materials will enhance your home's longevity and reduce maintenance costs.

Identifying your wants

Identifying and separating your wants from needs, when designing your custom home, requires a structured approach to ensure the final design aligns with both functionality and your unique desires.

Consider "needs" as the essential features required for daily living and functionality, such as the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, or storage space. They address practical necessities like comfort, safety, and efficiency. Your "wants" are those non-essential features that enhance your home's aesthetics or luxury, such as high-end finishes, an oversized master suite with spa-like features and a walk-in closet, smart home technology, or an infinity pool.

Individual and family lists are both important. Each family member should create their own list of needs, wants, and dreams. A master list can then be compiled that combines elements from those individual lists, identifying overlapping items as shared priorities. If you're designing your family's "forever" home, the most important wants will usually be those of the family members who will live in the home the longest, or who expect to inherit and live in the property.

Establishing a realistic budget

You'll want to consult with a financial advisor or your lender to understand the financing options available to you, then set clear limits on what you can spend on your home. To help your advisor establish a realistic budget range, that aligns with your financial capabilities, compile documents or spreadsheets on your savings, income(s) and assets.

Your architect or design-build contractor will divide your budget into key phases, such as land acquisition, site preparation, foundation work, framing, roofing, and interior finishes. Specific amounts will be assigned to each phase for cost tracking and project management. Your budget will guide the entire process, ensuring your dream home remains achievable without financial strain.

Establish a clear budget early and allocate funds for the essential elements first. Then use the remaining budget to incorporate high-priority wants. Remember to factor in long-term costs like maintenance and energy efficiency when deciding which wants are worth the investment. It's also recommended that you set aside 10-20% of the total budget as a contingency fund to cover any unexpected expenses or changes during construction.

The design phase: prioritizing your lifestyle and needs

Once you believe you've identified both your needs and wants, it's time to meet with the architect or designer. Needs will be prioritized over wants during this stage. For a successful design, all of the features necessary for day-to-day living must be incorporated in the design before considering the luxury finishes and amenities.

Some features could tick the boxes for both a need and a want. If a large kitchen is important, because your family prepares meals together, or it's the place where everyone gathers to do homework, catch up on emails or each other's days, while the dinner is made, it qualifies as both a need and a want. A good custom home builder will draw on experience to help you establish the nonnegotiables, balancing your vision with practicality.

Planning and pre-construction phase: fitting in some wants

During planning and pre-construction, as the initial numbers are coming in for the estimate, it's time to begin entering some of your wants, those features that didn't make the cut during the design phase. If there's room left in the budget, you can prioritize and then enter some of the most desirable luxury finishes and amenities that will enhance the overall aesthetic and enjoyment of your home. These might include solid hardwood floors, custom millwork, luxury window treatments, mixed metal fixtures, designer tiles, commercial-grade appliances, or that spa-like master bath with stand-alone soaking tub.

Compromise between wants and budget, but not needs

As you prioritize your needs and wants, you may encounter conflicts between primary needs and wants. It's important to establish upfront that you will not compromise on your family's needs. You might, however, consider revising the budget, if there's a feature you really have your heart set on. Also, look for middle-ground solutions such as selecting mid-range materials instead of premium ones, or creating multi-functional spaces that combine several needs and wants.

Resources

[Designing Your Dream Home: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Perfect Floor Plan](#)
[Net-Zero Homes in BC: Achieving Energy Efficiency with Sustainable Design](#)
[Designing and Building a Custom Home for Energy Independence: A Comprehensive Guide](#)

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