

# OPEN ATTRACTION

Today's flowing floor plans require careful consideration. **BY PAM GEORGE**



Home trends for 2018 include light colors, green materials and smart technologies—think Amazon Echo and Google Home. One thing, however, hasn't changed. Consumers are still in love with an open layout. "An open concept is definitely the modern-day floor plan," says Katie Winnington, principal designer for C&E Furniture in Fenwick Island.

Randy Burton of Lewes-based Burton

Builders would agree. "People want large communal spaces," he says. "The kitchen, the living room and the dining room become the hub of the house. It's a very fresh, modern look."

But it also presents challenges. People who own historic properties need to consider the integrity of the home's design, notes Burton, who handles renovations and additions as well as new home construction.

Whether the home is old or new, interior design is critical. Otherwise, you could wind up with a cold-looking cavernous space.

## Why Go Open?

An open layout typically includes a kitchen that flows into a dining area and a living room. It may also include a morning room, sun room or access to a screened porch.

The design is a boon for smaller homes. Without walls to separate the spaces, the home appears larger. There's also more natural light.

People who want a relaxed vibe often gravitate toward an open layout. "It's very appealing in the coastal area," Winnington says. "It can create a sense of togetherness in a main living space, and it doubles as a great space for entertaining." The host or hostess isn't separate from the guests while making drinks or dinner.

If you're building a new home, it's simple to incorporate the open concept into your floor plan. To be sure, it's hard to find a model home on the market without one, no matter its square footage. Adding it to an existing home is another matter.

Burton is working on a home in downtown Rehoboth Beach that dates back to the camp meeting days almost 150 years ago. Burton's clients love the charm and character of the cottage. But they wanted a communal area. The solution is a two-story addition on the back that mirrors the look of the origi-

nal house. Thanks to 16-foot doors, the porch also meshes with the living area.

"When we're finished, it's still going to have the feel of that cozy cottage," Burton says.

### Going With the Flow

Partly, that's because Burton is using such finishes as wood-lap siding, woodwork with an aged patina, classic trim and hardwood floors. In any design with an open concept, the finishes are paramount, he says. "You have to utilize ceiling trim and beams and other details so that it doesn't look like a big flat ceiling over a big rectangular space with perhaps a square off to the side."

Woodwork and beams can define areas. So can furniture and area rugs. "With no identifying separation of space, it can be incredibly challenging to decipher where a living room ends and a dining room starts," Winnington says.

The trick is to first look at your lifestyle. She asks her clients about the size of the family and the members' ages. It stands to reason at the beach that the owners will have visitors. How many and

for how long? What will they be doing in the room?

Clearly, you'll need a conversation area. "It's important to keep symmetry in mind in open-concept spaces," Winnington says. "I like to use pieces in twos—two sofas, two chairs—with a large cocktail to anchor the pieces."

Experts recommend placing other large pieces such as the dining set parallel or perpendicular to the sofa for more symmetry.

Not everything needs to be large. You can create small nooks in an open space. Built-ins by a fireplace, for instance, might be the perfect place for a comfy reading chair and light, Winnington says. A small table with two or four chairs is perfect for intimate dining or for working a jigsaw puzzle. Two plush chairs near a window with a table between is a welcoming spot for a couple's morning coffee and the newspaper.

### Rooms With Views

When choosing color and finishes, remember that there are wide sight lines—you can see the living room from

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the kitchen, for instance. A contemporary back splash in the kitchen might clash with a classic marble fireplace in the great room.

To make it easy, Burton Builders has design palettes featuring finishes that complement each other. You don't need to individually choose a counter top or back splash tile. "It's a storyboard to show how things work harmoniously together," Burton says.

For colors, Winnington recommends a neutral base. Then add strong pops of color throughout. Textures and materials such as smooth glass, woven accents, artwork and brushed metals will also give the room interest and connect the theme from area to area.

You can follow the experts' advice for other rooms in the home that echo the open concept—albeit it not on the same scale. Consider an owner's suite with separate areas for sleeping, dressing and sitting. You can even adapt the approach for outdoor rooms on decks and patios, where you might have conversation and dining areas, as well as spots for barbecuing, the hot tub or a fire pit.



Whether your home is old or new, make sure there are places where the residents can sneak away for some quiet

time. Despite the popularity of open concepts, there are times when a closed door comes in handy. **D**

