

# When less is more and bigger is better

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Everyone knows when a house feels airy and spacious. Less noticeable is what goes into creating that expansive atmosphere.

You can transform and lighten up a space you've lived in for years by changing colors, fabrics and furniture, or you can start thinking about maximizing square footage when architects are still in the pencil and paper stage.

"Land is so expensive now. Lots are smaller, and you have a smaller pad to build on," said Barbara Williams, Mercedes Homes' regional president of sales and marketing for central and southwest Florida. Williams lists open floor plans,

high ceilings, smaller foyers, half walls and bigger windows as design elements that create a spacious feel, regardless of a home's square footage.

"There's definitely a trend toward higher ceilings across the market," said Williams. "We're doing [at least] 9-10 foot volume ceilings, even in townhouses ... We only do 8-foot ceilings in less expensive, entry-level homes."

Light creates space, and Greg Lane, design VP for Mark Maconi Homes of Tampa Bay, said that any attempt to 'bring the outside in' supports Floridians' love of outdoor living and enhances the spacious feel of the interior. Lane recommends putting windows on more than one wall of a room whenever possible, and said, "It's very trendy right now

to replace traditional sliders with mitered sliding glass doors that open the entire corner of a room to the outside."

Williams adds that Mercedes is now installing 8-foot tall sliders rather than 6-foot doors that used to be the norm.

Minimizing long hallways and creating more efficient 'transitional spaces' is another space-saving strategy.

"Never just dead-end a hallway into a door," said Lane. "You need to have choices to go to different areas."

Current design options include building computer desk areas between the garage entry, utility room and kitchen and placing bedrooms off multiple sides of a central

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*Mercedes  
Homes' San  
Remo Model  
in Ballastone  
at Oakstead  
in Tampa*



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great room rather than lined up down a hall.

Coren Weiss, president of Inner Creations Inc., said recessed art niches make a space feel bigger and built-in furniture like Murphy beds and desks also maximize square footage in rooms that serve more than one purpose.

Flooring contributes to the open feeling when the same material flows from one space to the next. Switching from carpet to wood to tile at the end of every room and hallway leads to a choppy, patchwork quilt feeling, according to Weiss.

"Solid color carpet gives a more spacious feel than a heavily patterned one, and large tiles feel bigger than small tiles. Also, if you turn the tiles on the diagonal rather than laying them parallel to the wall, they fool the eye into thinking the space is bigger." Weiss reports that many custom builders now include the use of larger tile in their standard offerings rather than as a pricey upgrade.

Color works wonders on opening up a space, with pastel or white ceilings receding and feeling higher. Light walls are better than dark colors or faux finishes, and wallpaper works as long as it reveals a lot of light-colored background field.

When choosing and placing furniture, pieces need to be in proportion to the room. Open floor plans often include more than one entrance to a room, decreasing wall space and making it necessary to 'float' the furniture in the room.

"A larger room can take larger pieces, but clutter will challenge the spaciousness of any size room," said Weiss. "You

want to eliminate the clutter while having enough furniture so that the room functions the way you want it to." For an open look, choose smaller-scale pieces, tables with glass tops, light-colored woods, and chairs and sofas with legs rather than fabric that goes to the floor.

In overall decor, Weiss suggests sticking with several light to medium shades and introducing variety through different textures rather than too many colors. Keep window treatments light in color and fabric, and avoid multiple layers and draperies that puddle on the

floor. Hang mirrors so that they reflect an outdoor view, a piece of art or a pretty design element. And don't overaccessorize.

"Architect Mies van der Rohe said 'less is more' for a reason," said Weiss. "It's an old, classic principle that's still very meaningful." ■

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