

NARROW-LOT HOUSING

Four leading designers and architects offer five concepts for slender-lot applications.

By Larry W. Garnett, FAIBD, House Review Lead Designer

One result of escalating development costs has been the downsizing of lots. With construction dollars directly tied to the linear footage of roads and utilities, it stands to reason that lot widths continue to decrease.

It's not unusual to see lots in both infill areas and newly planned developments ranging from 30 to 55 feet in width. Creating functional floor plans, elevations with curb appeal, and overall site planning can be extremely challenging. Nevertheless, carefully conceived narrow-lot projects offer the desirable combination of privacy, low maintenance, and innovative architectural design that appeals to a variety of market segments.

This month, our design team offers a variety of narrow-lot solutions that address such critical elements as garage placement and the value of side yards. For more House Review concepts, including last month's report on infill-housing solutions, visit www.HousingZone.com/HouseReview.

2011 HOUSE REVIEW THEMES

- MARCH Expandable designs
- APRIL Focus on kitchens
- MAY Townhomes/urban homes
- JULY Single-family detached housing
- AUGUST Duplex/triplex
- SEPTEMBER Green homes
- OCTOBER Cottage homes
- NOVEMBER Live/work houses

DESIGNER'S ESSAY

Designed to fit on lots ranging from 42 to 55 feet wide, this home offers several design elements that take advantage of a narrow site. The expansive wraparound porch establishes a strong connection with the front sidewalk and neighborhood, while the arbor gates open to a more secluded side yard with just the right amount of low-maintenance outdoor space for entertaining.

Although the garage could be placed to the side of the house on a wider lot, the narrow lot with alley access as shown allows for an efficient and cozy site layout. The optional living quarters above becomes one of the most important and flexible elements of the design. Ideal as a guest suite or home office, this area might also become an income-producing rental in neighborhoods with progressive restrictions.

The open floor plan of the main house acknowledges the kitchen as the focal point of the home. Expansive windows offer views from the dining and kitchen area to the private side yard. Large windows in the living room provide plenty of natural light and cross-ventilation, while 10-foot ceilings throughout the home add to the openness.

Traffic flow, often one of the most challenging elements of narrow-lot designs, is successfully addressed here. Notice how the logical "paths" allow passage from one area of the home

to another without having to walk diagonally through any room. This results in rooms that are not only easier to furnish, but also require less square footage.

From an actual day-to-day living experience, it's often the details such as storage and functionality that make any home enjoyable. Linen cabinets in each bathroom, a built-in pantry in the kitchen, and a window and counter space in the laundry room are all greatly appreciated. Perhaps the most functional area, however, is the "drop zone." Here, you'll find dedicated storage for the mail, keys, cell phones, and all of the other items that are typically tossed on the kitchen counter.

Finally, the exterior design features a careful blend of materials and details resulting in a well-proportioned and traditionally inspired cottage. However, closer inspection reveals that the home is actually a very economical rectangle that utilizes simple and straightforward roof forms.



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PLAN 30502 (HOUSE);
30503 (GARAGE)

DESIGNER

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PLAN SIZE

House

Living area: 1645 sf
Porches: 343 sf
Width: 34 feet
Depth: 61 feet, 6 inches

Garage

Living quarters: 460 sf
Width: 20 feet
Depth: 23 feet



[NARROW-LOT SOLUTIONS]

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THE WATKINS

ARCHITECT

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PLAN SIZE

First floor: 1,253 sf
Second floor: 1,142
Width: 31 feet
Depth: 50 feet, 7 inches

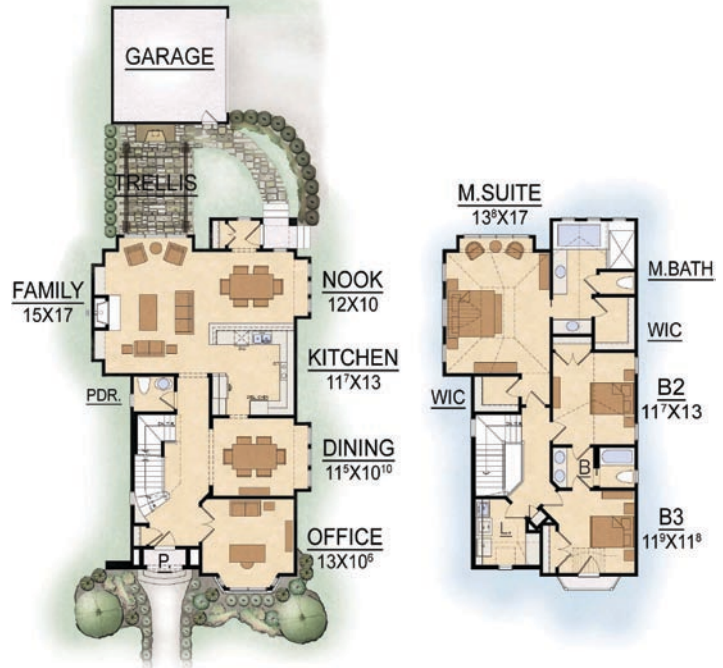
ARCHITECT'S ESSAY

This French eclectic home was designed on a small, infill lot in one of Michigan's most desirable neighborhoods. With a limited building area, using the entire lot as a design feature becomes paramount to creating a cohesive and marketable design.

Due to a specific city ordinance, the garage was required to be located in the rear yard. Based on this, it would be difficult to design for a traditional backyard, which is very popular in this market. The solution was to detach the garage, creating an intimate outdoor space between the home and garage. By placing an outdoor fireplace on the exterior of the garage wall, the courtyard becomes an extension of the home.

In addition, the garage serves as a privacy wall between the new home and the existing residence to the rear. On each side, a green fence has been provided to promote privacy and soften the hardscape of the driveway. By using the side lot line as an imaginary wall, the design seems to add another room to the home.

Lastly, a wooden trellis has been added to provide a sense of scale and sophistication to the space. Elements like a hanging light fixture and custom stonework have been implemented to compliment the Earth tones used on the home and green elements used to soften the space. The design, in conjunction with the elements mentioned above, seamlessly transition the exterior architecture with the interior, creating a more viable and stimulating living environment.



[NARROW-LOT SOLUTIONS]

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PLAN TNH-B-08C-3

DESIGNER

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PLAN SIZE

Living area: 1,157 sf
Width: 20 feet, 8 inches
Depth: 66 feet
Ceiling height: 10 and 12 feet



DESIGNER'S ESSAY

This month's concentration on narrow-lot solutions offers the opportunity to think through not only the efficiency of a particular design, but also whom the design may actually serve. Households are changing: 43 percent of Americans are single, baby boomers are retiring, and family size continues to decrease.

Because space is limited, narrow lots often lead to smaller designs, and efficiency without compromising quality is paramount. However, when considering household trends, fewer more flexible spaces may also be in order. We believe one- and two-bedroom designs will be an important solution for the emerging market. The example illustrated is the TNH-B-08C-3 plan from our Traditional Neighborhood Home series.

Here are some of the design approaches we employ in this plan:

- Redundant spaces are eliminated, leaving the remaining rooms larger and more flexible.
- The home is designed for the long term — clear expansion zones allow the building to evolve over time for changing needs and uses.
- Spaces are open to one another, extending views and light transfer while making rooms feel larger.
- Outdoor rooms effectively double living space while encouraging natural ventilation.
- The plan takes advantage of vertical spaces with higher, well-proportioned ceilings. Like great urban lofts, a 12- to 14-foot ceiling can make an amazing difference.
- The home is designed by the cubic foot and utilizes all building cavities.

Examples: We carve into walls for storage between studs and have exposed ceilings and upper-floor framing to gain character and perceived height.

Our goal is to provide an efficient, economical building with lower operating and maintenance costs, but huge character.



BUYER'S PLACE

ARCHITECT

RPGA Architects
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PLAN SIZE

First floor: 1,402 sf
Second floor: 846 sf
Width: 25 feet
Depth: 84 feet, 6 inches
Foundation: Slab



ARCHITECT'S ESSAY

Narrow-lot infill is one of several locations in cities around the U.S. that builders and developers should be seeking out in an effort to cater to a wider market. Because of the inherent attributes of these locations, such as existing neighborhoods, character, and infrastructure, narrow lots can provide elements that are either very costly to create or nonexistent in new developments.

In order to make these infill locations work, there has to be a change in the mentality from the normal, 50x150-foot residential lot. Also, while buyers are scaling back on square footage to hit a lower price point, there remains a strong desire for nice amenities, schools, and other key elements.

The goal of Buyer's Place was to design a series of 25-foot-wide homes that live and feel more like traditional-lot homes. A private drive was added to create a design that accommodates rear-entry garages, allowing the entire 25-foot front facade to be articulated and uninterrupted as the main entry point to the home.

These homes incorporate front porches, which allow the homes to more readily blend into the existing environment. Entry/stair halls make the homes' first impression spacious, while clear transitions from one room to another help define the different spaces. The homes also feature a yard and rear porch, a large kitchen, family and dining area, a study, three additional bedrooms, and a loft — all in a 2,248-square-foot package.

The homes' exteriors are full masonry with careful placement of the windows and differing hip and gable rooflines to create variety, along with distinguished lower roof porches, bay windows, and carefully crafted brick detailing to accentuate a sophisticated Victorian aesthetic. While the lots are sloped toward the street, the homes' foundations come out of the ground in the front with dropped brick ledges to emulate a pier and beam aesthetic.

All in all, while these homes are quite narrow, they have the presence and feel of typical-lot homes.



THE MAGNOLIA

ARCHITECT

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PLAN SIZE

First floor: 1,007 sf
 Second floor: 1,008 sf
 Width: 21 feet
 Depth: 82 feet, 9 inches
 Height: 33 feet

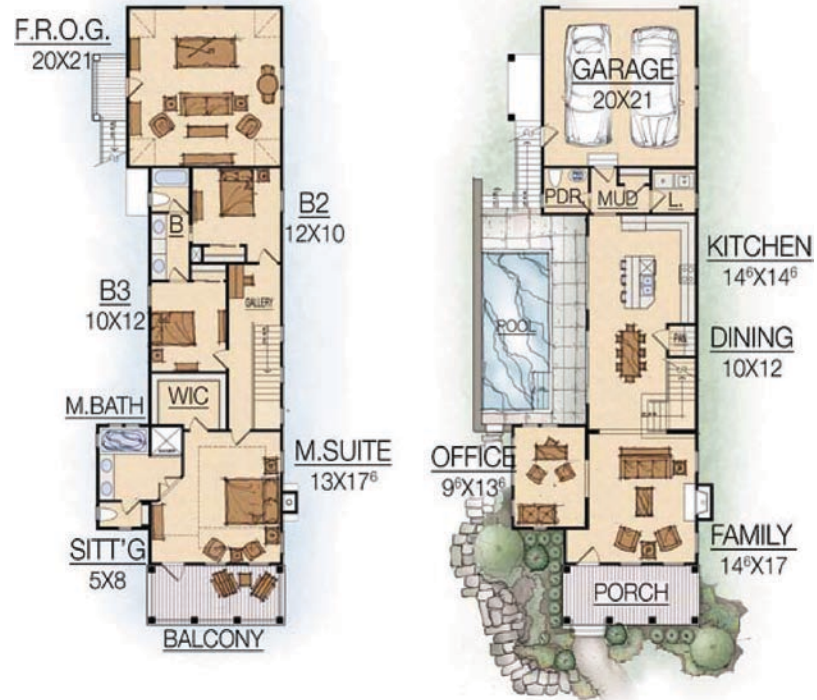


ARCHITECT'S ESSAY

Inspired by Charleston, N.C.-area design, the Magnolia blends traditional architecture with the modern amenities that today's home buyers demand. The intentional spatial integration between the main living spaces and the outdoor courtyard was inspired by the way traditional Southern architecture blends interior space with the surrounding landscape.

The Magnolia's open plan nestles entertaining spaces around a lap pool, which invites occupants to open the glass walls facing the pool and embrace the private outdoor courtyard and pool within the main floor of the home.

Private spaces on the second floor surround the courtyard, maximizing views of the pool and adjacent Battery Creek. A side stairway off the courtyard services an optional finished room over the garage that serves as a recreation retreat, detached in-law suite, or home office.



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Comments? Email David Barista, Editor-in-Chief, Professional Builder at dbarista@sgcmail.com.