

**March 2012**  
**Latest Trends Newsletter**  
**"The Family Room"**

Many thoughts may race through our minds when we start dreaming what the design of our home, our shelter, and the place of refuge we will live in eventually will look like. There is much to assimilate and prioritize. This exciting journey will not only be one of the most important to the family; but can also be a positive enlightenment about who we are.

In the past months we have explored several aspects in our quest on this roadmap to success, and will continue now with the Latest Trend- the Family Room.

First of all ask yourself if you are learning from these articles, and are enjoying the trip up to this point. Have I shared items of excitement and concern? Does the journey seem achievable for you? I would venture to say that most folks that I work with find the journey an exciting and challenging one with incredible rewards for a large part of their lives.

Last month we explored the "Kitchen" functions and discussed the necessity to place a priority on understanding the family's daily functions and how it is the force of the designer to use as guidelines to designing the space. When the space layout is approached in this manner, the positive results will always become apparent as the family functions are applied. The formula for this successful outcome is quite simply: *Create a well planned roadmap for the journey to the destination and positive results will occur every time.*

We are going further into the home this month and work on the central living space. The great room, living room, family room, whatever the label becomes, is indeed where the family gathers to interact. The space dedicated to activities of daily living, entertaining, media presentation, reading, playing, and a host of other family activities.

Again, I approach this space the same as all others, "define the functions, and respond accordingly." Ask the right questions, listen carefully to the response, analyze how with the past design experiences we have as professionals and how they will be applied. I always consider the size allocated for this and the budget assigned and then start placing our Client's vision to where this space will be located in reference to other rooms in the home. I don't have an exact formula of where everyone's living area should be placed as each family matrix is different and the actual location of the home. This room's orientation to the land is always paramount in the exact placement. Although the views, topography and connection to the other aspects and rooms in the structure are considerations; there is no set pattern of design.

Many times my clients simply can't picture this space in reality as to what the actual size of the space or the height of the ceiling will be. The height of the ceiling, whether flat, coffered, vaulted, etc. is almost always is a tough one for the client to comprehend. I try many avenues of explaining this and have found no perfect one but a collection of several for the Client to connect with. My cardinal rule is to never allow the height measurement to match or exceed the width of the room. For example: the room is 18 feet wide by 20 feet in length. I don't believe the height of this space should exceed 15 feet at any point, i.e. the peak of a vault. This percentage of 17% has served me well, but have pushed this to 15% when an abundance of windows are present. Again, no hard rule here, simply a base from which to work from. Remember the taller the space, the less intimate, warm and fuzzy the room may be. This has been proven so frequently, and yet we have all experienced a room that is "out of ratio". We can't quite understand the "why", but remain convinced that the space is not comfortable no matter the style or cost of the furnishings.

I will list below some other considerations that have worked for my clients as well.

Fireplace: The floor space of the room is 18 feet by 20 feet. Always make the fireplace at least 6-7 feet wide with the firebox at least 42 inches in width.

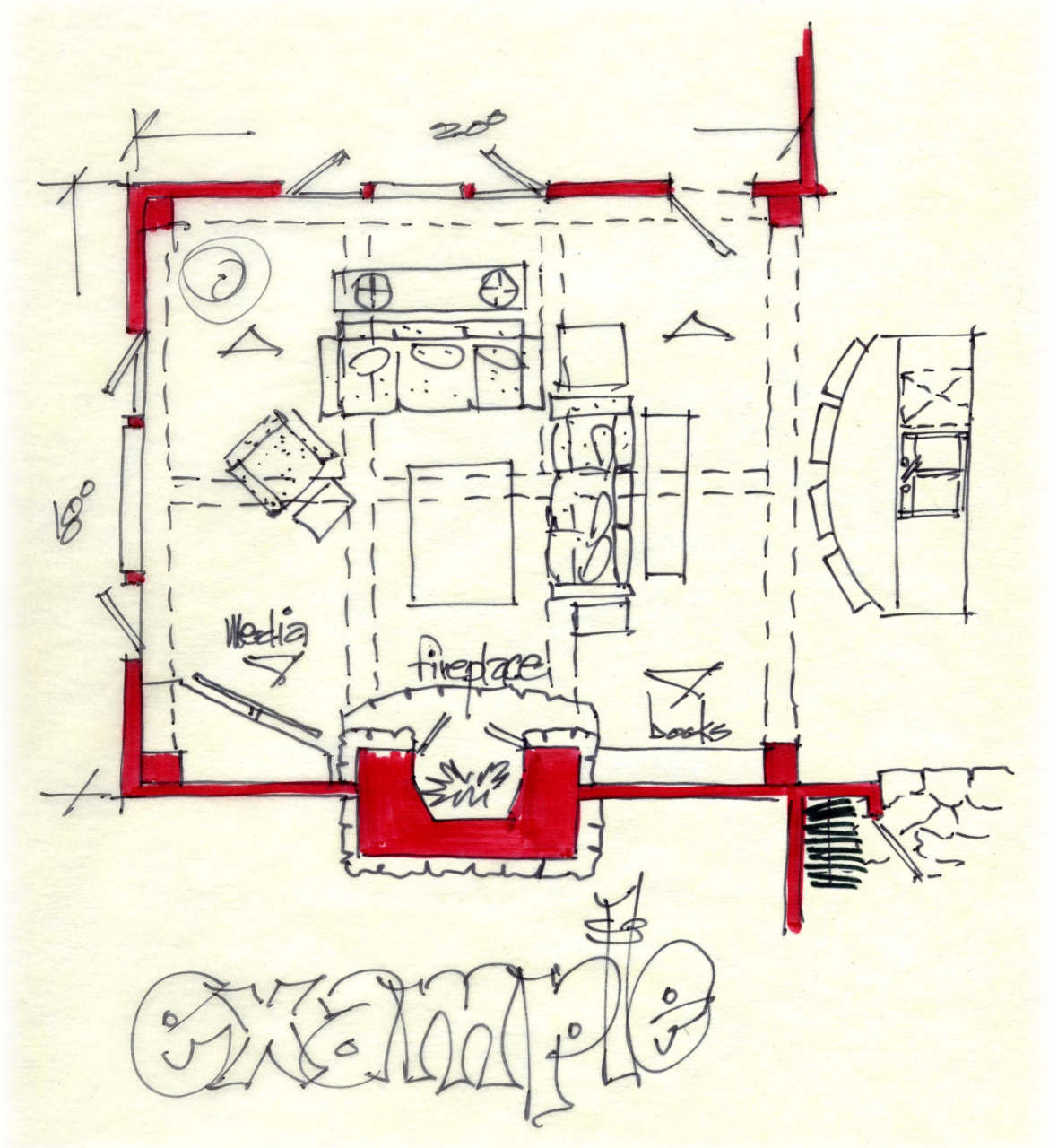
Media/Flat screen: Whatever the widths, and watch out for the "man screen" here, make sure it is placed without window glare reflecting into the viewer's face. Another tip, try and define where the primary space for viewing will be. I've had many Clients that want to view the screen from several points in the home, i.e. eating area, kitchen, family room, which can result in less than optimal viewing for any one space. Approach this issue with caution as we utilize this function much in the daily routine.

The consideration of storage, bookshelves, cubbies, etc. is sometimes the last and mostly overlooked important items in the space planning of this room. Our daily routines create a lot of clutter such as magazines, books, toys, and a host of other items, too many to mention. Where is their designated storage? Do we place them in the furniture or leave them lying around on top? I'm not practicing a "knick knack" approach, but clutter is just clutter and contributes to an attitude change for many folks.

The surface of the floor should be a carefully thought out consideration for this room. In recent years, we've returned to wood floors. These are great and always have served us well, except when I was growing up and had to wax them with "Johnson's Paste Wax." Well that was a punishment I did not look forward to! Today our finishes on the wood floors are so much more user friendly and the maintenance level is almost nonexistent. When utilizing wood flooring, remember how much sound travels and that using this product will result in added noise. Utilizing area rugs, fabric on furniture, and sound absorbing items of this nature will equalize this issue very well.

The amount of windows that we place in this room is all over the board. Again, I approach this issue on a per plan equation. I will say that in approaching the amount of glass in a given wall space, there are several practical considerations.

Do you have significant fine art to display? Are you concerned about heating or cooling loss? Reviewing that your walls may contain R-29, but the windows are just R-4. This calculation is hard for the window companies to divulge it seems. Utilizing these numbers in calculating a typical room results in the example below:



Room floor space 18 feet by 20 feet equals 360 square feet of wall space in this room considering that it is a three sided room as illustrated below with a 10 foot plate height (wall height) is 580 square feet of wall space. Now say that we have seven windows of 3 feet wide and 5 feet tall resulting in 105 square feet of wall area.

475 square feet @ R-29 or 82% of the wall space

105 square feet @ R-4 or 18% of the wall space

Results: actual R-factor for the room wall space is R-24.5

This can be acceptable and is in most applications; but should be a consideration when approaching the design phase.

I know I have probably created more questions than resulting in concrete answers, but this is the nature of designing a unique home for anyone. Each home is truly unique and every family has an individual lifestyle for which we as professional designers must consider when creating an environment for them to occupy. I suggest each of you reading this article work on the how, why and the time allocation in this space; and the very important family matrix prior to starting the actual design process with any professional on any room and total layout of your home.

Should you have any questions or want to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me at [www.kenpieper.com](http://www.kenpieper.com).

Until next time, enjoy the process!

Ken Pieper

KEN PIEPER AND ASSOCIATES, LLC