

BoKS-House
A Modern Habitat
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Efficiency

When it comes to efficiency, people are in tune with the miles/gallon of gasoline formula. It is easy to understand that a driver in most cases would prefer to go farther for less cost. A variable lost in that equation is the consideration of octane levels or the quality of fuel being used. There are also some trade-offs as the more efficient the vehicle is, the less hauling capacity it may have. When it comes to house floor plan efficiency it may not be as easy to comprehend. Most of the time people ask the question, *what the cost/square foot* it is to build. Like gasoline, every square foot is not the same *octane*. Some spaces may be trimmed out with custom cherry paneling, marble floors and high-end light fixtures coming with a high cost/square foot. Some spaces may be strictly utilitarian such as a workshop or mudroom and subject to only unfinished space costs. That surely affects the total price. The other not so obvious variable is the efficiency ratio. That is the net assignable floor area divided by the gross floor area. A 100% efficient floor plan would have no hallways, vestibules, stairways or mechanical rooms. We know that would be impossible to build, but it does inform what the question people should be asking. What is the cost/**assignable** square foot?

Assignable square feet include all spaces where the rooms have a useful function. Gathering spaces, cooking spaces, dining and sleeping spaces are all assignable. These are the spaces that really matter. By smartly arranging these useful spaces such that unassignable square feet are minimized, the owner is getting the best value/square feet. If cost is the top priority then expansive foyers, gallery hallways, dining furniture museums, balcony overlooks, large vaulted ceilings and over sized showplace kitchens must be scrutinized as to what value they really add. Not only do these unassignable spaces add to initial construction costs, they must be heated and cooled over the lifetime of a house. They must be decorated and maintained over the years. They are subject to additional property taxes and could even lower house value for efficiency minded buyers.

I'm not sure if the days of over the top *WOW* factor spaces are done for everybody but budgets are tighter and an easy way to reduce cost is to tighten up the floor plan. Yes, this advice comes from an architect. Usually one would assume that an architect might attempt to *sell-up*. These *WOW* spaces are fun to design and look great in promotional images. Is it possible to get both efficiency and unforgettably rich design? As the mantra goes, less is more. By providing flexible open space, the owner has the freedom to assign uses as they see fit. Area rugs and furniture can be used to define space as the moment may require. Efficiency provides the avenue toward imagination and may bring the project in on budget by letting you go that extra mile.