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Notes from Fiddler's Choice

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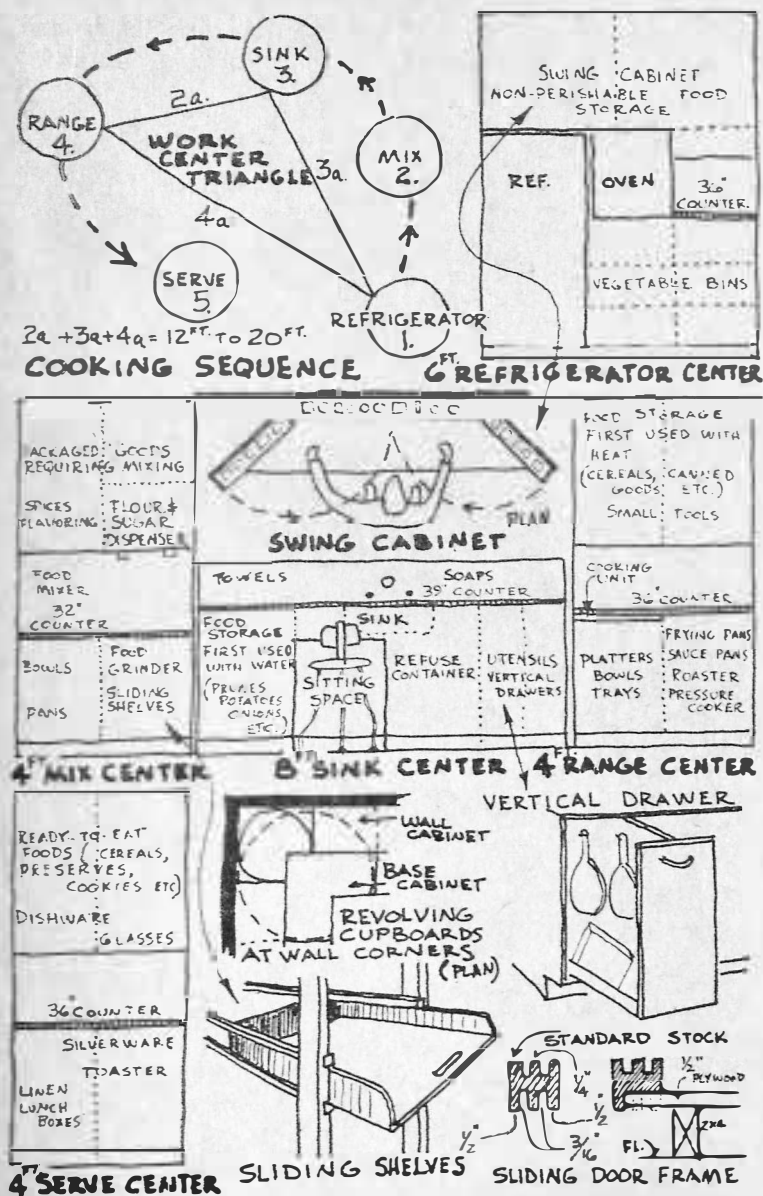
By Ken Kern

In the *Group Living Space*, design and structure, chapter, open planning and flexibility concepts were discussed—concepts to enhance and embellish space for esthetic appreciation. Following this, *Individual Living Space* design and structure considerations stressed the need for a physically and psychologically healthful space arrangement.

This present section on the design and structure of cooking and dining functions likewise includes esthetic and healthful considerations, but also some concepts that have to do with *human engineering*, which is simply engineering for human use. In our use of cooking appliances, for instance, we design for optimum efficiency (measured by the comfort, safety, accuracy and speed of the function to be performed). The house that holds the appliances should be designed the same way. Many "physiological work studies" have been developed in England and in Scandinavian countries to better determine housing needs. Designers in these countries have gone far to engineer equipment to meet human requirements. Their considerations take into account: (1) the psychological aspects conditioned by tradition and social pattern; (2) the physical aspects of solar orientation, view, indoor climate, air circulation and sound insulation; and (3) the human engineering considerations that have to do with a person's convenience arc, involving his or her height, reach, motion pattern, and space needs.

Contrast this human engineering approach with our present condition: a recent University of Illinois Small Homes Council survey of over a hundred housing developments found that 90% had inadequate base cabinet storage, 77% had too few wall cabinets, and 67% had constricted counter space. From the standpoint of human engineering there are five requirements for an optimum cooking-work center: (1) adequate activity space; (2) adequate counter space; (3) adequate equipment space; (4) adequate storage space; (5) an arrangement of all these areas for maximum efficiency. Obviously, few home builders follow the necessary steps to develop a truly efficient work center.

"Motions take time." So, in designing a cooking layout the first question is, "Where is the best location for what?" In answering this we first must analyze the work to be done. For a righthanded person the cooking sequence is from right to left: store, mix, sink, range, serve. For each of these areas we next determine the equipment and supplies needed. Pieces of equipment and supplies should be arranged in order of sequence of activities required to do the job, and at heights related to your body and its ability to use them in that position. Cooking research at Cornell University established a 12-foot to 20-foot relationship between refrigerator, sink, and range. A continuous counter would be convenient in some respects; but from a human engineering standpoint the sink (for the modal American adult) should be three inches higher than the standard (36-inch) counter height, and the mixing center should be 4-inches lower (32-inches). A physical strain occurs when a modal worker reaches into a storage cabinet lower than 20-inches from the floor or higher than 60-inches from the floor. Strain also occurs when a negative (backward) angle of bend is made by the body, while straightening up to avoid being hit by an opening upper cabinet door. Sliding doors are to be preferred. Sufficient floor space for working in front of and passing between each element of the work-center should be provided. Finally, planning should consider such necessary features as light, acoustics, heat, and ventilation.



(continued next month)

To Florida, cont'd

at one time rather than a room at a time. The former method is more economical, simpler and will produce a better house. Finances not permitting, build a separate garage or utility building, move in, then build the house all at one time.

In my case, the room-at-a-time system caused so many difficulties with the municipal authorities that in disgust I altered the plans to reduce the eventual size of the house. By building in two stages and having to apply for a permit to expand through the second stage, I made myself vulnerable to what amounted to virtual blackmail. The city council used an ordinance that had been passed during the time I was building the first stage to try to force me to make a free concession of land to widen the road passing the house. This, in spite of the fact that the city attorney opined that I had the right to proceed without interference.

In attempting to make some compromise, I ran into a wall of indifference. I had been stopped because I had refused to be intimidated, and that was all that was important. Lawyers were of no help. They were interested in the size of the fee, hardly in fighting for a principle.

I had heard that "The Poor Man Can't Fight City Hall." Those with money to spare do it all the time by taking their cases to the State Supreme Court if necessary, but most of us despair after a few feeble attempts.

I believe in the worthy fight even if defeat is the probable outcome. Some money placed in the right hands would have allowed me to proceed unhampered but I had enough principle and energy to butt instead of backing off.

Let "Them" Take Action

I reasoned that if I could not afford to take the city to court, I would let them initiate the action on the assumption that they were not really interested in the principle involved. I defied them by building a small frame room off by itself, asking no one for permission. It wasn't long before one of the building inspectors came around while I was away at work and left me a note to cease construction. I ignored the first notice and several succeeding ones until finally a "condemned sign" was put on the frame room. There was a certain satisfaction in having a city official come looking for me after months of vainly going to them.

It Worked!

I paid no attention to any of their actions and continued with construction of the frame room. By being ignored, the city officials were confronted with the choice of taking legal action or doing nothing, because most were men of little integrity and there was no financial gain for them in taking legal action. In later years, I saw time and again that seldom would any civic project be undertaken unless there was some cream to skim off the top.

On several occasions, my brother and I offered the city council an easement to the land they wanted when they tried to halt construction on my house. They professed to show interest, then proceeded to forget about the whole idea of widening the street. I've told all this to show that you can fight City Hall, but it's usually expensive. Far better to locate where there are few or no building restrictions. In such case, it is wise to insulate oneself from neighbors by obtaining enough land.

My house today consists of two bedrooms, two and a half baths, living room and kitchen. It's hardly a homesteader's house, but to us it is esthetically satisfying; and to me, its most important feature is lack of a mortgage.

Because of our mild climate and our insect problem, we make free use of much screening. I'll have to admit that in this field, modern technology has developed a superior product. Both aluminum and fiberglass are fairly free of corrosion and quite durable, in addition to being reasonable in price.

Notes From Fiddler's Choice

By Helen Ryan, Franklin, N. H.

We have been homesteading at Fiddler's Choice for nearly two years. We have built Joe's Workshop, in which we are still living. The snapshot below shows Joe putting siding on the west end of our rigid-frame-construction shop. (American Plywood Assn. prints very specific plans for buildings of various spans.) The building has no ridgepole or horizontal framing, this function being performed by the plywood skin over the frames. Plywood sections are glued and nailed into shape on the ground, then raised into place by pulling on a rope tied to the top.

We also have built a tool shed, and have plans to build at least the shell of our house this summer, and perhaps our sauna-laundry-sap-and-greenhouse. After our house is finished we plan to use the sleeping lofts in the shop for visiting would-be homesteaders to work alongside us.

We have begun our third gardening season. Slowly but surely the soil is building up so that something will grow in it. Poultry houses around here have contracts to let dairy farmers take their manure. For us, sawdust, cover crops and compost are our sources of enrichment. Owners gave a nearby old sawdust heap to us, so we have something to help build the moisture in our sandy, sieve-like soil. Some sand is so pure we use it for mortar without washing it.

The Engineered House

Those who are interested in house building — specifically, wooden houses made of boards, planks, and posts, ought to know about Rex Roberts' book, *Your Engineered House*. Although it is aimed at the person who will



hire an architect and contractor, there is much of it that is most pertinent for anyone planning to build his own house. It is published by M. Evans and distributed by J. B. Lippincott.

Roberts examines the construction of a wooden house and discards or modifies all techniques that he does not find good reason for. Besides general chapters on sites—very readable and informative—and styles (which he finds useless) and materials, he goes into great detail on his systems of foundations, walls, roofs, windows and doors, and partitioning and arranging the interior. He is quite concerned with getting the most livability for the individual family's particular needs at the least cost, both in original construction costs and in upkeep and tax costs.

He not only shows many ways of cost-cutting; he shows techniques for planning to get the most out of the site, avoiding expensive grading, bulldozing, and re-landscaping to try to restore the havoc of the bulldozer. He has good suggestions for making space serve its intended functions and for having what the owner thinks of as several rooms and the tax assessor regards as only one room. We highly recommend this informative and delightfully readable book as a good complement to Ken Kern's volumes. If your library doesn't have it, the Hatch Loan Library does (St. Johnsbury, Vt.).

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MANUAL FOR A SIMPLE BURIAL. A very useful little booklet, written by Ernest Morgan (3rd edition). Shows how to obtain simplicity, dignity and economy in funeral arrangements through advance planning. Has lists of funeral and memorial societies and eye-banks; tells how to bequeath your body; etc. \$1 from School of Living.

THE OWNER-BUILT HOME is nearing completion. Vol. 4 will be finished in October issue of *Green Revolution*. It will be reprinted in looseleaf form, 3-hole punched for insertion in ring binder, as were Vols. 1, 2, and 3. Each volume is \$2, from School of Living or direct from Ken Kern, Sierra Route, Oakhurst, Calif.

BOOKS FOR SALE

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Contact Corner

Here we list (and will continue to list) names and addresses of persons who want to be in touch with others about the use of land and development of community. Send your data for listing.

School of Living Center, Heathcote Rd., Freeland, Md. 48 acres.

Ferdi & Rebecca Knoess, Pennington, Minn. 145 acres.

Mrs. Joy Valsko, 657 7th St., Traverse City, Mich. 100 acres (near Suttons Bay).

Paul Marks, Box N, Los Banos, Calif. 4 acres for trailers (near Ripley, Calif.). Planned community in Central America.

Chester Dawson, Box 2468, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Small acreage in Arkansas.

Ed & Mary Borsodi, Star Route 1A, Smithville, Okla. 74957

Don & Annerose Rollins, Rt. 1, Box 149A, Rathdrum, Idaho.

Chas. McAdams, Box 1165, Chautauqua, N. Y.

Mike & Joan Smith, 12696 Dupont Rd., Sebastapol, Calif. 95472

I wonder if readers would be sure to send a self-addressed and stamped envelope when they write a letter to the School of Living that requires or is likely to get a personal answer. This will save us money, but most of all it will save time.—Editor