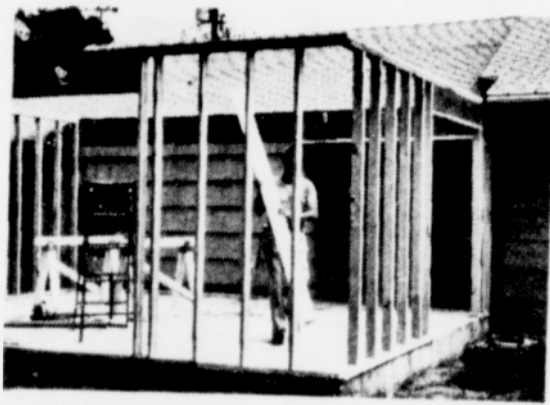


# Customizing houses growing trend

As an inflation hedge and tax write-off, the single-family home is still one of the best investments a middle-income family can make. But for a growing number of households, while the big three-and-four bedroom house is too much, the smaller house just isn't enough.

What's the solution? Many small families are opting for the less expensive house and then customizing it to fit their lifestyles.



Among the many ways to customize a small house, the room addition ranks high as a space-stretcher. Many part-time do-it-yourselfers lack the time and often the skill to create the total structure. This family hired a professional remodeler to erect the rough shell and then finished the 16-by-20 foot room themselves. Here, two-inch by four-inch stud walls are being set in place on the concrete slab foundation.



New room addition automatically adds market value to the home. Siding and roof shingles were installed after the basic structure was sheathed in construction-grade plywood and building paper. The homeowners chose a siding which they painted themselves. They also installed interior prefinished paneling and trim to the family room themselves thereby saving hundreds of dollars in labor costs. The textured plywood siding is painted a mellow, burnt-umber to contrast with the main house.

The large house is perfect for the growing family with children. But if all the space is not used, it can be an unnecessary burden in extra mortgage payments and taxes.

Further, the under-used space usually has to be heated and cooled along with the rest of the house creating a waste of energy and a drain on the owner's resources.

The smaller house generally costs less. And with careful planning and a moderate investment the house can be customized to exactly fit the space requirements of its occupants.

The possibilities are endless but the all time favorite space expansion project is still a one-room addition, usually single-story on a concrete slab. A new room as small as 9' x 12' makes an excellent enlargement to an existing living room, a separate den or even guest bedroom.

Many homebuyers today keep their mortgages as small as possible and then take out a home improvement loan to add the space. The loan, although it is an extra monthly burden, is usually paid off in five years.

Handy homeowners, of course, can do much of the work themselves and keep the over-all cost of the project well under control. Although too complicated for most part-time, do-it-yourselfers, many have the rough shell constructed by a professional remodeler and then do all

of the finishing work in their spare time.

Expert advice and guidance on installing interior and exterior building materials is as close as the local lumber yard.

The customizing of dwellings has taken many directions.

Old-fashioned, open porches are being enclosed to create an extra room or enlarge the living room. Often these homes are sheathed in clapboard or lap siding badly in need of refurbishing. By re-siding the exterior with easy-to-handle 4' x 8' sheets of plywood siding, these old homes are being modernized in the space-expansion process. Re-siding is best left to the expert remodeler, however.

Garages, either attached or detached, are being converted to home workshops, studios or extra bedrooms. A garage on two levels can be converted into a small rental apartment to help offset monthly mortgage and tax payments.

Virtually all areas of the home are candidates for space conversions—from basement to attic and including breezeways which if properly situated make excellent greenhouses for the plant enthusiast.

Whether for the growing family or for the "empty nester" couple whose children have matured and moved away from home leaving behind empty bedrooms and unused yards, the small home has become more popular than ever before. And the possibilities for gaining just the right amount of space seem to be limitless.



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