




Open Concept Floor Plan Considerations

by Rachel Fawcett on May 13, 2025
phrc.psu.edu



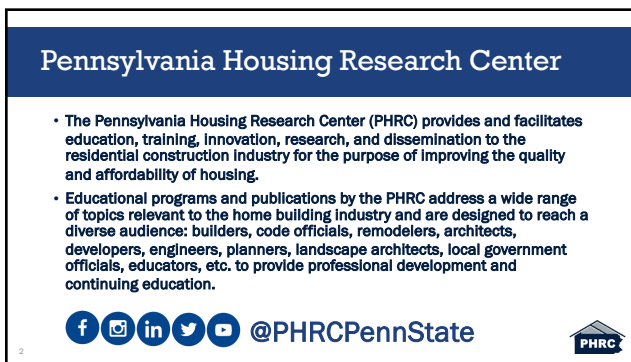














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PA Building Contractor Outreach Survey

- **Take the survey today!** Your input is valuable and appreciated.
- The purpose is to assess building contractors' knowledge or & experience with weatherization; identify stakeholders; identify worker recruitment opportunities & challenges; and more.

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Description

Tune into this session to learn about open concept floor plans in residential construction. You will gain an understanding in how to effectively assess if an open concept floor plan is a good choice for a home and its occupants. We will begin with an overview of the history on the concept and when it rose to popularity in the United States. Next, the session will address common uses and overarching goals for an open concept floor plan in the overall function of a home. Finally, we will discuss opportunities and challenges for the builder and occupant that should be considered when designing an open concept floor plan.



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Learning Objectives

1. Understand the history of the open concept floor plan for residential construction in the United States as compared to traditional floor plan design.
2. Recognize common uses and overarching goals for an open concept when designing a home for the occupant.
3. Highlight the opportunities in an open concept including flexibility in spaces, increased natural lighting, greater social interaction, and more for the end user versus a traditional floor plan.
4. Discuss potential challenges for this concept such as the functionality, MEP systems, acoustics, and structure of the space, which may add increased installation and construction costs.



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Background of the Open Concept Floor Plan



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Background of the Open Concept Floor Plan

- History of the Floor Plan in Homes
- History of the Open Concept Floor Plan
- What is an Open Concept Floor Plan?
- Growth in Use of the Open Concept Floor Plan

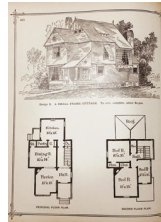
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History of the Floor Plan in Homes

- Before the 20th century, floor plans were typically **closed-off spaces**
 - Rooms branched off of hallway
 - Entertaining and dining spaces near the front entrance
 - Kitchen towards the rear for deliveries, heat, & cooking
- House design was **pragmatic**



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Image Source: The Home Library of Useful Knowledge, 1888. <https://archive.org/details/home-library-of-useful-knowledge-1888/page/n72/mode/2up>



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History of the Open Concept Floor Plan

- Frank Lloyd Wright's **"Prairie" design**
 - The semi-open interior of Frank Lloyd Wright's 1901 "Prairie" design
 - Open fireplace unites the separate areas
- Creation of precursor to kitchen island



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Image Source: University of Michigan Library / Ladies Home Journal, 1901



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History of the Open Concept Floor Plan

- Grew in popularity during the post-WWII years with the baby boom
- By the 1990s, became the norm in new construction

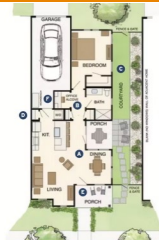
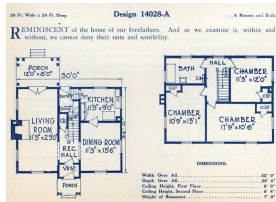


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Image Source: Clark Associates, <https://clarkassociates.com/topics/home-garden/open-concept-design-in-the-1950s-1960s>

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Traditional vs. Open Concept Floor Plan



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Image Source: Clark Associates, <https://clarkassociates.com/topics/home-garden/62-beautiful-unique-home-design-floor-plans-2020-21>
 B - Exterior Design: 2, Larry M. Gamm, <https://www.probuilder.com/design/house-review/valley-02-2017-0806/ideas-for-small-house-that-showcase-great-design>

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What Is an Open Concept Floor Plan?

- 2 or more rooms with related uses are combined into one space
- Examples:
 - Kitchen & dining room
 - Dining room & living room
 - Kitchen, dining room, & living room



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Image Source: TK Design & Associates, <https://www.probuilder.com/design/house-review/valley-02-2017-0806/ideas-for-small-house-that-showcase-great-design>

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Growth in Use of the Open Concept Floor Plan



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Image Source: L - DECORILLA, <https://www.decorilla.com/blogs/decorating/interior-design-styles-101/>
R - Century Communities, https://www.centurycomm.com/design/why-the-open-floor-plan-is-hot-to-404_6



Common Uses & Goals

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What Is Home?

- **Who? Understand your family dynamics**
 - Children
 - Multi-generational household
- **What? Understand your lifestyle**
 - Raising children / caregiving
 - Working from home
 - Entertainment & hosting
- **How? Understand your spatial use**
 - Adjacencies
 - Dining area near the kitchen
 - Living room seating near a children's play area
 - Public vs. Private Spaces



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Image Source: The English Alky, <https://www.theenglishalky.com/House/rooms.html>



Why Is the Open Concept Used?

- **Visually connected spaces for:**
 - Promoting spaciousness & ease of movement
 - Enhancing natural & shared light
 - Increasing flexibility in design & space use
 - Fostering a sense of community & togetherness
 - Socializing & entertainment
 - Connecting with outdoor spaces (less common in PA)
- **Potential for higher real estate value**

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How Are Spaces Defined in an Open Concept?

- Placement of furniture like couches or tables, fixtures, & area rugs
- Kitchen islands or peninsulas
- Changes in flooring type or ceiling heights



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Image Source: Georgia Home Remodeling, <https://georgiahomere remodeling.com/photos-and-cases-of-an-open-concept-floor-plan/>



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Examples

- Kitchen & dining area are joined by a common island or peninsula



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Image Source: Living with Love / Life Created, <https://www.livingwithloveandlife.com/interior-design/an-open-plan-going-out-of-style>



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Examples

- Dining & living area separated by furniture, flooring / ceiling change, etc.

26 Image Source: Jessica Brumby Photography/Scottish Design, <https://www.jessicabrumby.com/portfolio/designs/in-south-avenue-going-out-of-style>

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Examples

- "Great room" connecting kitchen, dining area, & living room

27 Image Source: Rob Harris Productions, <https://www.probuilders.com/design/accessibility/article/5221753/new-home-design-solutions-for-aging-in-place>

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Challenges for Open Concept

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Challenges for Open Concept

- **Physical Considerations**
 - MEP Systems
 - Structure of the Space
- **Energy Costs for Heating & Cooling**
- **Functionality**
 - Visual Privacy
 - Acoustics
 - Odor Control
- **Design & Furnishings**

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Physical Challenges: MEP Systems

- **Lack of walls can add challenges for locating:**
 - Water supply and drainage
 - Kitchen
 - Bar area (additional sinks)
 - Bathrooms
 - Wiring
- **Consider how floor plans are stacked**



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Image Source: /Wiki, <https://pixabay.com/photos/construction-steel-plumbing-wiring-272291/>



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Physical Challenges: Structure of Space

- **Relies upon steel or laminated beams instead of interior load-bearing walls**
 - Can be simpler for new construction vs. remodel
 - Can increase upfront costs of construction
- **Potential for less storage**
 - Less cabinets in kitchen
- **Added risk of fire & smoke spread**

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Energy Costs for Heating & Cooling

- Open Concept floor plans are typically heating / cooling a larger space
 - Adding challenges to temperature regulation
- Traditional floor plans can allow for separation of spaces and the ability to split home into different HVAC zones
- Increased windows means less insulation



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Image Source: Georgia Home Remodeling, <https://georgiahomere remodeling.com/press-and-covers-of-an-open-concept-floor-plan/>



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Functionality: Visual Privacy

- Doesn't allow for spaces of privacy
- Minimized ability for concurrent, different uses of space
- Risk of clutter & visual noise



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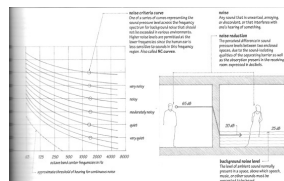
Image Source: David Lovett / Future, <https://www.homedesignideas.com/interior-design/in-open-plan-giving-out-of-style>



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Functionality: Acoustics

- Sound travels across open space
 - Appliances
 - Conversations
- Noise reduction is lessened due to lack of walls
- Potential for echoes



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Image Source: Francis D. K. Ching, A Visual Dictionary of Architecture, Reaktion, A NHB Book (New York, NY: Reaktion, Wiley, 1995), 221.



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Functionality: Odor Control

- Odors from kitchen easily spread throughout the house
- Odors across mixed uses like food cooking in the kitchen & a candle burning in the living area



Image Source: Century Communities - Executive Plan, Dublin Architecture | Planning | Interiors, <https://www.pdubois.com/design/house-review/article/5.28.18/55-ideas-for-creating-a-modern-luxury-home-design>

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Design & Furnishings

- Open Concept Floor Plan necessitates a cohesive design across all spaces
 - Less wall space for art/decor



Image Source: Century Communities, https://www.southernliving.com/design/why-the-open-floor-plan-is-here-to-stay_2

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Design & Furnishings

- Traditional Floor Plan allows for unique styles, finishes, & color palettes in different rooms

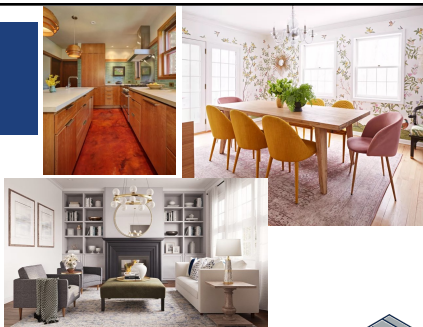
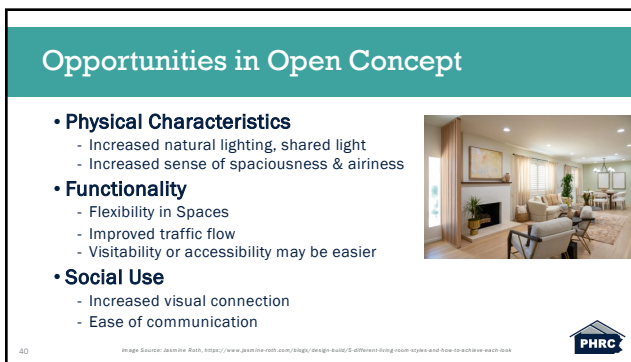


Image Source: Robyn L. - Modern Interiors, <https://www.pdubois.com/design/house-review/article/5.28.18/55-ideas-for-creating-a-modern-luxury-home-design>
 Top Left - City Square in Atlanta, <https://citysquareatl.com/this-project/kitchen-rebuild-entire-in-entire-kitchen/>
 Top Right - Modern Interiors, <https://www.pdubois.com/design/house-review/article/5.28.18/55-ideas-for-creating-a-modern-luxury-home-design>

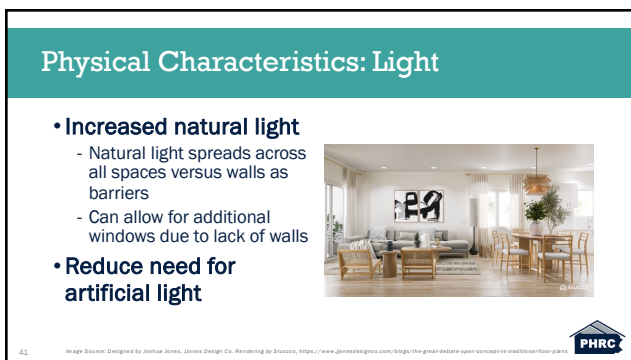
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Physical Characteristics: Spaciousness

- Eliminating barriers like walls and doors opens up the space
- Can feel more inviting
- Can feel larger than sectioned rooms using less square footage



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Image Source: Modern Architecture, <https://www.modernarch.com/room-ideas>



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Functionality: Flexibility in Spaces

- Furniture or movable pieces can be used to divide spaces
- Use of spaces can easily change as needed
- Remodeling can be easier



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Image Source: Alamy, <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/2224872/room-dividers-ideas>



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Functionality: Improved Traffic Flow

- Sense of spaciousness due to open layout
- People can move freely without walls or doors to open
- Ideal for gatherings or households with lots of movement between spaces



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Image Sources: 1 - GAD Design Group, <https://www.pinterest.com/design-house-reviews/2224872/room-dividers-ideas>
2 - Laura W. Barrett, PHRC, <https://www.pinterest.com/design-house-reviews/2224872/room-dividers-ideas>



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Functionality: Visitability & Accessibility

- Increase in flexibility allows for additional freedom of movement
- Easier connection throughout plan with minimal effort to navigate door and hallways
- Helpful for aging in place



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Social Use: Increased Visual Connection

- Allows for people to gather in groups while still feeling connected to everyone
- Keep an eye on people like children or aging parents while in a different space



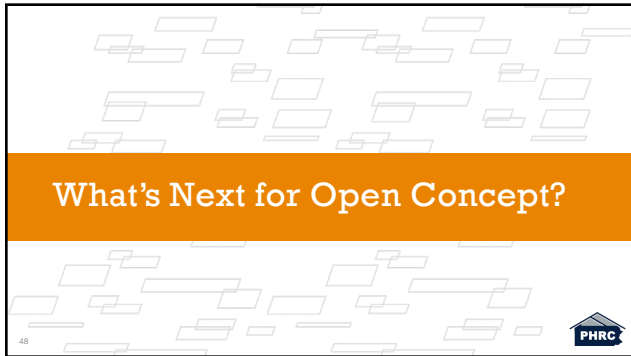
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Social Use: Ease of Communication

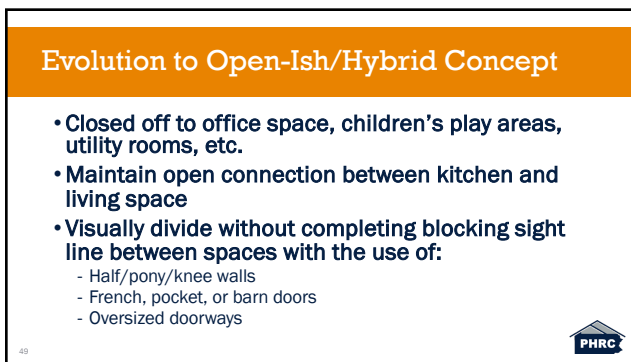
- Allows for people to talk across spaces as needed
- Visual sightlines aid in communication for those who speak ASL



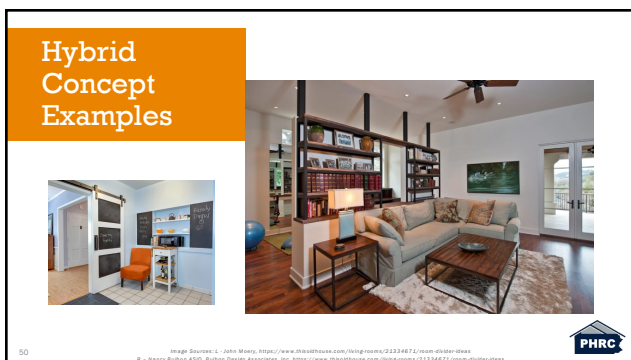
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Summary

- **Open Concept Floor Plans** come in a variety of shapes and forms
 - Like homes, there is no one design fits all
- **For custom builders – While designing, consider how home will ultimately be used by residents**
- **For production builders – Do you have an open concept floor plan? If not, what design best suits those seeking the concept?**

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Questions?

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PHRC YouTube Channel

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