

Hope for the misfit home

Editor's note: Madison architect Duo Dickinson shares with our readers a chapter, with a working title, *Mistakes, Misfits and Missed Opportunities* from his upcoming book, "Saved By Design" to be published by Taunton Press.

By Duo Dickinson
Special to ShoreView

What happens when you can't live with – or live without – your house? This local architect wants to end house abuse. Or at the very least, homeowner abuse. Poorly designed, planned and built homes leave a legacy of misery behind that can be costly to fix or remedy and prove even more difficult to live with. Madison architect Duo Dickinson writes this exposé in his upcoming book, "Saved By Design," to be published by Taunton Press. Below is an excerpt from a teaser chapter.

1. Ignorance Is Bliss. Paper plans purchased on the internet don't often sit well when the rocky reality of earth, terrain, view and neighborhood are ignored every time by these stock designs that are seemingly teleported into any given community. The results often find hind ends, backsides or other best unseen/under grade elements launch out of the terrain, or your family room faces an earth tsunami of hillside, or your porch flies out into the free space of the canyon just beyond your back door.

2. The Stereotype That Binds. Whether it's the Center Hall Colonial whose center hall corners you into absurdly tight passageways and rooms that are just that one foot too short in any given direction, or the Cape whose second floor is intended more for Santa's elves than Santa himself, or the Ranch whose large picture window faces the ever so graceful cul-de-sac – stock stereotypes tend to stub a bunch of functional toes.

3. Bungled Building: Earlier generations of homes that have had second, third and fourth owners who each, in their own manifest destiny, determined to make a stereotype "their own," more often than not, built mindless extensions. Rooms became corridors. Building shapes and roofscapes beggar description and invite leaks and rot. The genuine charm of a classic house is crushed by growth.

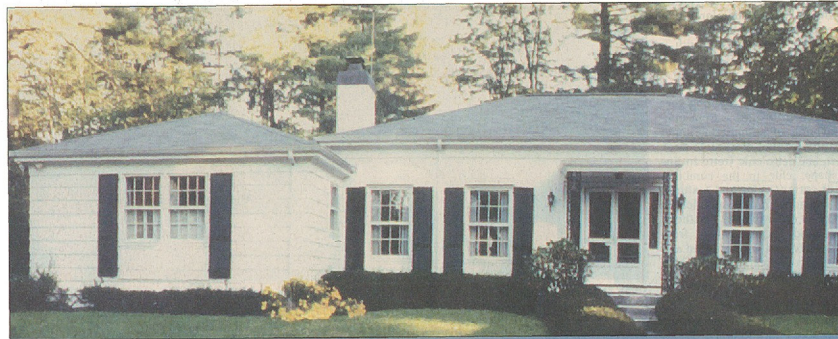
4. House As An Island: Even when perfectly situated to appreciate the natural amenities a site offers, most stock plans from the last few generations have one or two single doors to gain access to the "great outdoors." For whatever reason, our culture has decided that inside/outside is a state of being that is devoutly to be wished. Therefore, terraces, decks, screened porches, and large areas of glass facing private views are often unseen in these "safe" boxes.

5. Entry, Entry, Whose Got the Entry? When standard homes with traditional plans sit on streets with no sidewalks and when car access rules house entrance, front doors become vestigial. They become exterior paneling, never opened and surrounded by a cloak of "foundation plants" that rise in all their glory to the second floor.

6. Money to Burn: Back when the "All Electric Home" was the "House of the Future," or when central heating was such a fabulous innovation that just having one zone was miraculous in and of itself, and when two inches of some form of chewed up newspaper/mammal hair/cotton gin byproduct was used to provide a thermal break akin to a 30-year old sweater, our homes gave only a passing nod to containing their heat loss.



Above, Bungalow fun: architect Duo Dickinson's transformation of this misfit a ranch below.



7. Plain Old Bad Ideas: How about those built in planters of California Ranch fame that spawned unending rot in your walls? Or how about the eaveless roof over the Center Hall Colonial or Cape front door stoop that manages to wash every visitor's backside during any precipitation. Or the 2'x3' "mud room" that sits just inside the door to your garage (sometimes known as a closet). Or perhaps it's the powder room that sits directly in front your Center Hall Colonial's front door (even better when the toilet is in full view). Then there are always wooden sliding windows, asbestos shingles, popcorn ceilings, wall-to-wall carpet over particle board, and the 1,001 other ways stock suburban American homes either do it on the cheap or do it while brain dead.

Editor's note: Watch for solutions to these all-too typical home quandaries in Duo Dickinson's next installment to be published in *Shore Home*, soon.



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