

Taking a Value Design from Bland to Beautiful

In today's market, creating a house that has built-in value is key to sustainability for both homeowner and builder. In an attempt to reduce costs many builders are opting for the "value box" approach. The value box concept is to completely stack the second floor over the first floor walls. This includes the walls in the garage as well. By stacking the walls the builder is able to completely take full advantage of the foundation and create simplicity in the structure. This approach most often results in a two story garage as the prominent element. This can make the façade foreboding and unappealing to potential homeowners. There are ways to handle this however, below is an example of beautifying the façade without breaking the bank. Let's take a closer look at the before elevation below.



At first glance you might notice the separation of the windows. The generous space between the windows with sparse detailing above the gaping garage door oddly evokes an image of a face (a classic look for scary cartoon houses.) The garage massing dominates the home and throws the whole composition off balance. It is reminiscent of grandpa's old adage: "the tail wagging the dog." While this arrangement creates an economical solution by stacking structural elements, the mass becomes overwhelming and therefore unappealing.

How do we dress up what is otherwise a very nice home design? One way is by shifting focus and drawing your eye across the façade. In this example we extend roof elements over the porch to soften the effect of the large garage mass. Also, projecting the porch with a defining roof helps to create variations in the front of the structure and brings the size of the mass down to a more human scale.



Grouping the windows together above the garage door eliminates the scary face look and adds the charm and grace of a cottage home. Trim details are also added to further reduce the field of siding, adding texture and visual appeal. Detailing over the garage provides a break in the vertical nature of the garage massing.

Why is this important? The answer: First Impressions. Builders competing in today's market have found that bad proportions, oversized windows and lack of detailing make selling homes difficult even though the floor plan may work for the buyer. That first impression becomes crucial in pulling the buyer into the house so they can see that this is truly the home for them. If the buyer does not feel an instant emotional connection with the home it is much more difficult to make a sale. Creating a warm, aesthetically pleasing exterior is one of the best ways to tug at the heart strings of potential buyers.

I had the pleasure of meeting Mary Schumacher from Schumacher Homes a few years back and besides the fact that she is witty and charming, she is also brimming with wisdom. She told me that she always wanted designs that would make the prospects "slam on the brakes." She explained that a house should look so great from the curb that it causes people to immediately put the brakes on. That really resonated with me, and now with every house I design I give it the Mary test: Will this house really cause them to slam on the brakes? The over-riding goal should be to build a value designed home that is guilty of creating a few fender benders without crashing the budget.

While there are many ways to design value into your home one of the strongest methods in the industry is to utilize Lean Design. Lean Design uses the art of collaboration between architect, builder, construction and sales to create a home that exceeds the buyer expectations and builds efficiently allowing for larger margins. Lean Design ensures elimination of waste while utilizing today's hottest home building trends. It is a fallacy to think that in order for a home to build efficiently that it must be cheap. The opposite is true! By eliminating waste Lean Design allows budget for amenities that would otherwise be off the table. When designing a value home there is no need to be drab or bland. Instead warm the exterior with trim, proper proportions and design aesthetic. This will bring the type of balance and proportion to your designs that will cause potential buyers to slam on their brakes!

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