

Balance needs versus wants as you consider a home design, writes **Johanna Leggatt**

Top 10 questions before you build

THERE are no hard and fast rules when it comes to choosing the right home design. What suits one family might seem too large or clunky to another.

What's more, fashion is a fickle beast and trends in home designs are constantly evolving.

The must-have home features of 30 years ago — pool room, anyone? — have slid into obscurity, replaced by servery windows, butler's pantries and alfresco dining.

Weighing up what you need versus what you want (or what is on trend) is a delicate exercise, but through a process of examination and elimination it's possible to winnow the large range of designs on offer to one that suits you.

We asked some of the top builders for the questions buyers should be asking themselves before they settle on a design.



1 WHO WILL BE LIVING IN THIS HOME?

To begin with, buyers need to ask who will be living in the home and what their needs are.

"What a buyer requires from their home will be completely different, depending if they are a growing family or an older couple who are looking to downsize," said Eight Homes sales manager Celeste Andrews.

"A young family may put an additional living area on their wish list, like a kids' retreat, to give children the freedom of their own entertaining area."

Similarly, a growing family with teenagers might choose to add a home office, or a study nook in each secondary bedroom.

2 HOW MUCH DO I HAVE TO SPEND?

This question is crucial, as your budget sets the parameters for your wish list (and how achievable it is).

Burbank managing director Jarrod Sanfilippo recommended buyers start with a mortgage broker.

"They will help you weed out the hundreds of home loans available and choose the exact one that's right for you," Mr Sanfilippo said.

And don't despair if you don't have a substantial deposit. Ms Andrews said: "A lot of our buyers think they need 10-20 per cent of a deposit to get the ball rolling with their new home. However, by purchasing off the plan and with the incentives provided to first-home buyers, they may actually not need that amount."

3 WHAT TYPE OF HOME WILL BEST FIT MY FAMILY'S NEEDS?

It's important to choose a home that will suit your lifestyle, and don't be afraid to choose something a little different.

"Be open minded and broaden your options by considering diverse dwelling types with smart living designs," Mr Sanfilippo said.

"For example, are you an active young couple or busy bachelor who would prefer a low-maintenance home?"

You might decide a townhouse, terrace, duplex or apartment is more suitable for your lifestyle than a large detached home.

"Visit the sales offices and talk with the sales consultants about your ideas, wants and needs," Mr Sanfilippo said.

4 HOW LONG WILL THIS BE MY HOME FOR?

You'll need to consider: is this a stepping stone to a bigger home, or do I want to stay permanently and raise a family?

"If the buyer plans on spending a short time in the home as a young couple, they may only choose to have three bedrooms and one or two living areas as that will be sufficient for just two people," Ms Andrews said.

"However, if that same couple were expecting to start a family and stay in the home for five to 10 years, they may look at getting a bigger home that offers more.

"This includes multiple living areas, three or more bedrooms and two bathrooms, as well as enough storage and backyard space for kids to enjoy."

5 HOW WILL THE BEDROOMS BE ARRANGED?

One of the first things buyers decide on is the number of bedrooms they will need.

However, according to Dennis Family Homes general manager Mike Butler, an equally pertinent question is what configuration the bedrooms should take.

"Someone with young children may prefer bedrooms close to the master suite for easy access at night," Mr Butler said.

"Those with older children and differing night hours may prefer separation of the master suite, with it operating more as a sanctuary away from the other bedrooms.

"For those people who do shiftwork, should the master bedroom be at the

front of the home or should it be located in a more secluded position at the rear?"

6 HOW MANY LIVING SPACES?

Gone are the days when a home had one living space and a dining room. These days, a number of living zones are possible in large homes.

"For a couple newly starting out in their first home, one living space will suffice, even with the later addition of younger children," Mr Butler said.

Buyers also need to consider the location of living spaces.

"Do you want all the living spaces to the rear to take advantage of indoor-outdoor living or do you prefer to have at least one living space to the front of



the home for guests or potential noise separation from the other living spaces?" Mr Butler said.

7 DOUBLE OR SINGLE STOREY?

Having weighed up the previous two questions, you should get a good idea of whether or not you need a double or single-storey home. But there are other things to consider.

"Firstly, you need to ensure the size of the home you want will match the land size you have or are about to purchase," Mr Butler said.

"If the block you choose is smaller, to ensure you can get the numbers of bedrooms and the living spaces you desire, you will probably need to build a double-storey home."

8 HOW DOES THE DISPLAY HOME SUIT MY OWN NEEDS?

Looking at display homes is an essential part of building a new home, affording buyers a sense of what it would be like to live in a certain home.

According to Metricon's general manager of Victorian housing, Peter Langfelder, buyers need to keep a set of questions in their head as they tour displays, starting with whether the home will suit their lifestyle.

"Buyers should ask how the home looks from the street and whether the facade of the home is impressive," he said.

"Do you feel a wow factor when you enter the home?"

"What sort of garden and entertaining area will suit your family lifestyle? Is the flow of the floorplan good? Is the home built using quality



materials?" Mr Langfelder said the display home's construction was a good indicator of the quality you could expect for your own home.

9 WHAT ARE MY MUST-HAVE FEATURES?

When it comes to building a home, most buyers have a few things in mind that are simply not negotiable.

"The easiest way is to write two lists: one based on what you need and the second what you want," Mr Langfelder said. "These lists are different for different people. However, it is an easy way to determine your priority list."

Mr Langfelder recommended buyers consider spaces such as a butler's pantry, outdoor entertaining area and home theatre.

"By forward-planning the design features you both want and need, it will

make selecting the best-suited floorplan much easier," he said.

10 HOW DO I WANT TO PERSONALISE MY HOME WITH COLOURS, UPGRADES AND EXTRAS?

Buyers can inject their own personality and taste into a home through customising or upgrading standard designs. "Certain upgrades, like stone benchtops or quality floor coverings, will always add value to your home, and are something you'll use every day," Mr Sanfilippo said.

"Buyers should speak to their sales consultant about available floorplan options and make sure they're clear on the inclusions that come with their chosen home."

Most builders offer expert interior advice on everything from colour schemes to kitchen sinks.