

THE 8 FOOT HOUSE

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Images: Andrew Pogue



Concentrating on reducing waste and maintaining his focus on good design, William Buyers of 720 Design produced a uniquely sustainable house from the ground up. A rigorous architectural plan to not cut raw materials resulted in an innovative home that shows how unnecessary waste can be.



THE 8 FOOT HOUSE. Sounds small, right? Think again. The only thing that is small about this house is the amount of waste produced during the building process. William Buyers of 720 Design has big ideas about how to cut out scraps. Buyers has been a one man show for ten years – he is the architect and the contractor. Only working on one project at a time allows him to save money and devote his undivided attention to each renovation or new build. Design consistency is the result of Buyers’ technique – being the sole decision maker throughout the process results in homes that flow from room to room.

Buyers describes his sustainable approach as passive – passive in the sense that the design process is sustainable, not manifested through ground breaking technologies, but instead by paying close attention to mainstream practices. Seemingly simple decisions resulted in an organic home that reorganizes our space. Buyers’ discerning nature takes us back to the programs of early modern architects – ask questions about how we live and answer with thoughtful design.

THE IDEA

Inspired by previous projects, Buyers had been imagining the 8 foot house before it became a reality. During renovations on a project in Krisana Park, Buyers saw firsthand the efficiency behind the design of homes in the 1950s. Buyers explains - “When I took the whole home apart, I started to understand that there were these underlying systems going on, maybe it wasn’t as clear and rigorous as what I was doing, but I realized everything was eight foot framed and it didn’t feel uncomfortable to live in.”

When Buyers purchased a narrow lot close to Arapahoe Acres and in the Slavin Elementary School District, the 8 foot house came to life.

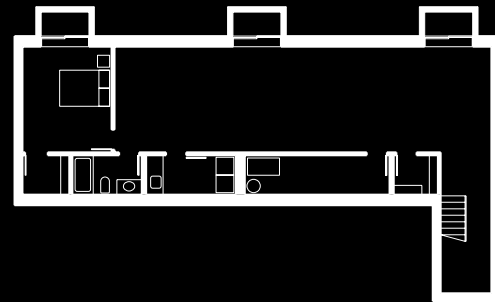
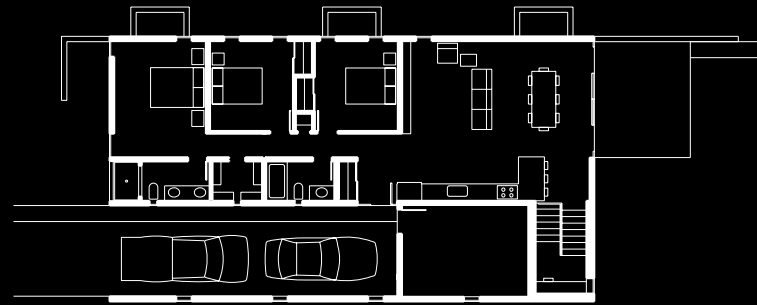
THE MATERIALS

The use of five structural bays infilled with 8 foot tall wood studs was the first step in the process. This allowed Buyers to use full height cedar plywood panels on the exterior of the house. Without having to cut any studs or plywood panels Buyers saved time, money and waste. But how much waste?

Buyers paints the picture best – “Materials are 4 x 8. You can special order 4 x 9 or 4 x 10, but once you go away from that you are always going to have a little strip of plywood here or there and you need something for your plywood to go against, that is your studs. Say you arbitrarily want 9

PREVIOUS PAGE: Where is the front door? The 8 foot house has a mid-level entry at the back end of the carport. The motion detector lights alert the homeowner when someone is coming to the door.

ABOVE: Buyers believes front yard living is a thing of the past and this house exudes that ideal. If you are wondering why there isn’t a picture window peeping into a living room that is because the master bedroom is at the front of the house.



and 1/2 foot ceilings - you are basically taking a 10 foot wood stud and ripping 6 inches off every piece - chop, chop, chop. Then you put your 8 foot materials up and you have to rip off another piece of plywood to sheath it. You have all that waste and that is what I tried to steer away from."

For the interior, Buyers used full height gypsum board sheets. Why cut the windows? All of the windows on the main level of the house are 2 x 8 feet and go from floor to ceiling. Door headers, who needs them? The doors are 8 foot solid core maple that stretch from floor to ceiling. Buyers' effort to not cut any materials, beginning with the studs and continuing to the windows and doors, results in a home with vertically heightening lines.

THE HOUSE

Simultaneously while thinking about cutting out waste, Buyers was thinking about how we live today. Do our homes reflect and accommodate our lifestyles? The 8 foot house has a mid-level entry next to a stacked carport. Eliminating the traditional two car garage gave Buyers more living space to work with. Stemming from his belief that large front yards are a thing of

ABOVE: The top plan shows the ground level with the public living areas at the rear of the house, adjacent to the backyard. The private bedrooms are stacked at the front of the house. The lower plan is the basement where there is extra space for a family room, a spare bedroom and a laundry room.

BELOW: The front door opens into a spacious kitchen / living room / dining room area with Bosch appliances and Caesarstone countertops. Buyers purposefully left this space open to allow the homeowner to define their living space. There could be a dining table to accommodate ten guests or a pool table and dart board. Or the space could be cleared and used for mingling during a party.



the past, Buyers focused on positioning the living room and kitchen area adjacent to the backyard. "I really believe in backyard spaces and having a place where kids can go run around and while you are inside you can still see them. Why have these giant front yards which really don't do anything anymore?" Buyers asks.

Placing the communal areas of the home at the rear meant the private areas of the home would be at the front. While that might seem like an odd concept, the connection between the indoor and outdoor living space works. The wall of windows separating the backyard fill what could be a family room, dining room or entertaining space with warm natural light.

Going against the traditional design of a home makes some people uncomfortable. Buyers' response? "I get bummed out when people come along and say, 'aww, I'm so disappointed, we were hoping for something more traditional.' This is a well built house and there is no waste whatsoever."

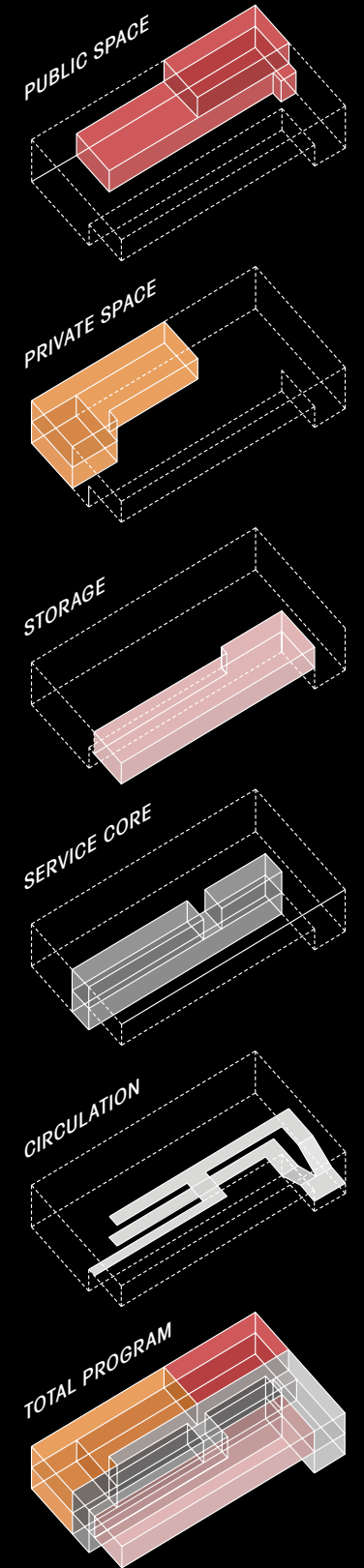
Why have a pitched roof if it isn't necessary and doesn't add to the space of the home? Why have a 10 foot ceiling instead of 8? Saving money and reducing waste doesn't mean cutting corners and using poor quality materials. For Buyers, it means doing it all - being the architect, the contractor, the landscaper, while paying attention to the way we live and cutting arbitrary decision-making out of the building process.

ABOVE LEFT: In the carport the front door is perpendicular to a door that leads to an indoor storage space. The storage space is 180 sq. feet, alleviating the need for a shed in the backyard and reducing clutter inside the house.

ABOVE MIDDLE: Western light streams down the hallway from the master bedroom window into the living area. The cross sections of natural light gleam, giving the ground floor warmth.

ABOVE RIGHT: The zebra grass outside the master bedroom window screens the view of the private space from the sidewalk. Double hung windows open at top and bottom for a breeze.

RIGHT: Buyers begins each project with detailed drawings - "These diagrams function as abstract models through which I can investigate organizational strategies. In the case of building on a narrow site, I was looking at compressing and extending interior spaces to their functional limit. What resulted is a series of elongated volumes that define different programmatic spaces, but through their length allow for maximum interaction between bordering programs," explains Buyers.





ABOVE: Realizing the need for a place to set the mail and wanting to de-clutter the kitchen counters, Buyers created a desk and storage area on the stair landing. The space is a nice alternative to an office. If the homeowner doesn't need to dedicate an entire room to an office this is a functional substitute.

RIGHT: In an effort to provide privacy to the shower, wood slats obstruct the sand blasted glass window. The wooden slats allow light to penetrate the master bathroom while keeping those showering out of view.



ABOVE (FROM TOP): Using 8 foot doors removed the need for traditional door headers. The door frame extends from floor to ceiling. The continuous ceiling makes the space seem heightened.

To minimize intrusion, Buyers inlaid the light fixtures. Not wanting to reduce the 8 foot ceiling to a 7 foot ceiling with large light fixtures Buyers kept it simple.



RIGHT: The wall of windows open to seamlessly connect the indoor and outdoor living spaces. This arrangement is ideal for watching kids playing in the backyard or entertaining guests during warm weather. Buyers concentrated on connecting the public space of the home to the backyard because of his belief that families are utilizing their backyard as opposed to their front yard.



ABOVE: The cement board rain screen around the top of the house is water resistant and low maintenance for the homeowner. The cement board is breathable and will not retain moisture which prevents mold.

LEFT: Buyers had to rethink the traditional downspout. Because the spouts couldn't be on the sides of the house discarding the runoff water on the neighbors' houses Buyers chose to place the spouts at the front and back of the house combining them with a collection basin. During rainstorms the runoff flows out the spouts creating a waterfall. Innovative design of a usually mundane element resulted in a functional water feature.