

Thinking outside of the builder box

by Elizabeth DiSalvo

"What is a house? Why do the houses in Fairfield County all look the way they look? Why does that house look just like this one, and why does this one have funny fake stone and such boxy proportions? This is not my beautiful house! How did we get here?"

These are the thoughts that run through my head when I drive around our area. And then I think about all of the cool clients I have met who want to live in a house that they love, but can't find anything like it anywhere! If I had a dollar for every client who said "I want live in a house like 'X', I would have, well, more money than I do. Say, enough to take a really nice a trip.

Anyway, what does a house like X look like? Generally, it is a not-so-huge house (3,000 to 4,000 square feet) with a ton of natural light, and open floor plans. It has not-so-huge bedrooms with bigger closets, super functional bathrooms, and lots of built-ins and storage for clean clutter free living. House X uses natural materials for a healthy living environment, it's really energy efficient, requires very low maintenance, and maybe has solar panels and a water collection system. Many people also want this house to be somewhat modern. Not too modern but that sort of natural wood, warmer, sunlight-dappled modern that you see in magazines.



These clients personalized their home to make it fun, light filled and very well loved.

So why can't they have that!? Well they can! And it is not so hard to achieve. Unfortunately, your average builder does not build this. They tend to build the "builder box" that we have all come to expect to know as "house." This is a house

that has developed over the years since the 1950s when mass production houses began to cover the American landscape. They are driven and shaped by low-cost framing methods and cheap materials. The aesthetics of the American Home (read

"builder box") were not "designed." Nor were they really even thought through by someone thinking about energy efficiency or maintenance. They came from production efficiency standards and bang-for-the-buck development methods, very much a cart before the horse approach.

Once they are built, we become accustomed to these houses. In fact, Realtors then promote them as the thing that sells. I have had many new home clients tell me that they would like to build a modern house (right here in Fairfield County!), but their Realtor told them that they would never sell such a thing and so should absolutely only build a colonial. And by colonial they mean ... well ... if you can't find a real historic colonial, then a builder box. I love my Realtor friends (hi!), but I want us all to start thinking outside of the builder box.

So what can we do? I say build what you love! Renovate your house make it your own and don't settle for the builder box. Demand more! Together we can transform the American House. Imagine your neighborhood filled with super energy efficient, sustainable, light-filled homes that work and are a joy to live in! What a wonderful world it would be.

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