SHAPE / SIZE

Houses come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some, however, are definitely better than others. The best shape for a house is one that allows the most number of principal rooms to get good access to sunlight and views. In a single family house, this usually means that the house is wider on the lot than it is deep. This maximizes the exposure to the front and back yards and minimizes the amount of rooms that face the side yard. In the best situation, every principal room should look out to either the front or back.

The shape of the house is even more critical in a multi-family house where there is often only one wall with windows. In this case it is very important that the unit be wide enough in order for all of the principal rooms to have enough light. Too many fast houses are too long and narrow. They are very deep and result in spaces in the middle of the plan that do not have sufficient access to sunlight, ventilation, and views.

Many fast houses compensate for bad design choices by supersizing the floor area and creating a number of extra, oversized rooms. Like wearing an overly large shirt, these houses do not usually fit very well and livability suffers because ther is too much walking, too much cleaning, and too much empty space to furnish. Supersizing also unnecessarily inflates the house's environmental footprint because of the extra energy required to not only build but also to heat and cool all of that space. A Slow Home is a compact size but that does not mean that is has to be small. It should be efficient and appropriate for its purpose.

| Shape / Size	Slow Home: Rules of Thumb
LIVABILITY	**ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT**
☐ In a single family house, principal rooms face the front or back yards.	☐ The house should have no redundant spaces.
☐ In a multifamily unit, principal rooms are in proximity to the windows.	☐ The house should have no supersized rooms.
☐ Overall depth is limited to allow sunlight into the center of the house.	☐ The house should have a compact, efficient layout to minimize heating and cooling loads.

Shape/Size:

FAST HOUSE COMMON PITFALLS

1 **House is too deep with living room windows in side yard**

In this narrow house, all of the windows in the living room open onto one side yard **A** and two of the bedrooms face the other side yard. **B** Fire codes typically restrict the size of these openings to a minimum area. The result is that these spaces will be dark and closed in because they only have views of the neighbor's side wall.

(1710 sq ft single family house, Ohio)
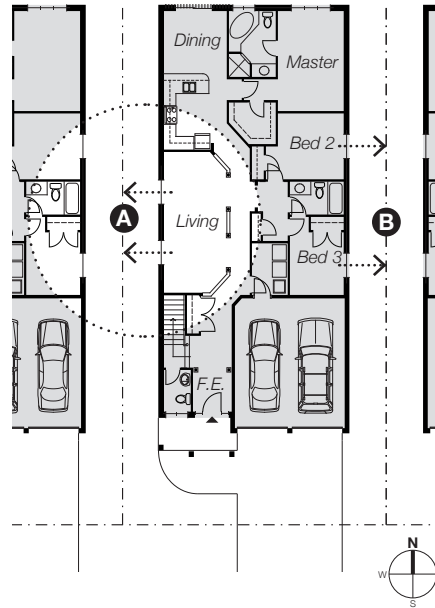
2 **Square plan limits light in center of the house**

A house with a square proportion often has a center space that is dark and with no real connection to the exterior. In this house, that space is occupied by the kitchen. **A** Even though it opens into the family room the kitchen is too removed from the rear façade to get much natural light.

(2156 sq ft single family house, California)
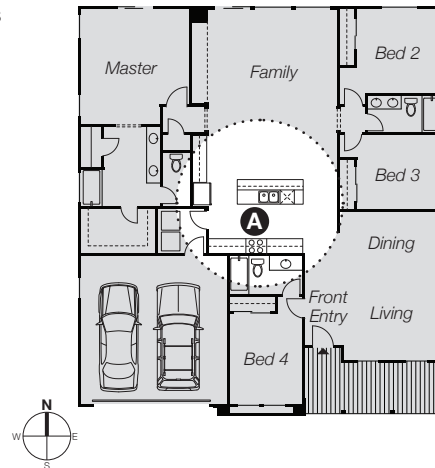
3 **Deep narrow plan limits light in the back of the house**

This apartment is very long and narrow, with only a minimal amount of exterior wall space. This negatively impacts the livability of the unit in two ways. The first problem is the competition between the living room and the bedroom for windows that results in a living space that is too narrow to furnish very well. The second issue is that the kitchen and dining area are too far away from the exterior wall to receive adequate natural light. As a result of poor proportions, the majority of the living spaces in this unit will be dark.

(625 sq ft condominium, Washington)
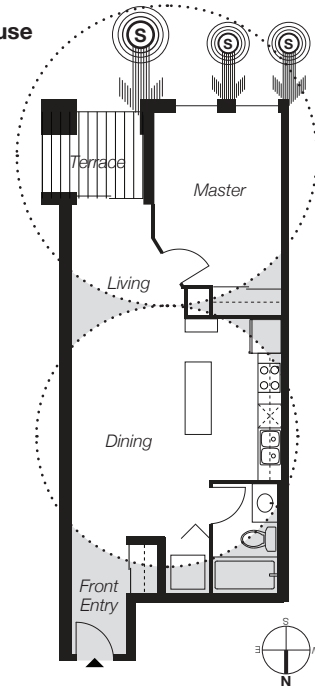
4 **House has sprawling footprint**

Although this house is large by any standards the fact that it is also a bungalow makes the supersizing problem even more acute. The single story structure not only consumes twice as much land as a two storey house, it also has a higher embodied energy cost because each square foot of roof and foundation only supports one square foot of living space instead of two.

(4507 sq ft single family house, New Jersey)