



INDOOR / OUTDOOR LIVING

The interior living spaces are usually the most important parts of a house, and often serve two or three functions at the same time. This kind of multi-tasking is harder to accomplish when the living spaces are closed off individual rooms. An open, flexible, loft like living space that also includes the kitchen and dining area is a much more effective way to accommodate this overlapping of uses. Although many fast houses incorporate some version of this arrangement in a so called “great room” concept, the reality is that many of these rooms are just not all that great. They can be the wrong proportion or the wrong shape. They can be too large just as easily as being too small. Remember, a big empty room might look impressive but it isn’t necessarily very flexible.

Outdoor living spaces are equally important and a Slow Home should have at least one. They should be visual extensions of the principal indoor living space, bringing many of the internal functions of the house out into the fresh air and sunlight. In good weather these spaces can often double the amount of available living space at only a fraction of the cost. Unfortunately, most fast houses are designed as hermetically sealed boxes and most terraces are left over spaces that may hold a barbecue but little else. The situation can be even worse in multi-family units where the balconies are usually oddly shaped, poorly proportioned, and only the minimum area required by the planning code.

Indoor/Outdoor Living

Slow Home: Rules of Thumb



LIVABILITY

- Interior living spaces are organized around a focal point and can be furnished with no wasted space.
- Interior living spaces have good natural daylight and a connection to an outdoor living space.
- Doors to outside living spaces are large and do not disrupt the functionality of the living spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

- There are no falsely labeled, redundant, or unnecessary living spaces.
- The living spaces are not out of scale or supersized.
- The living spaces are properly oriented to the sun and view.

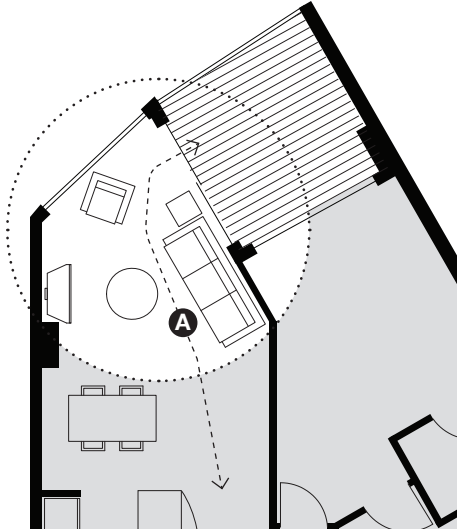
Indoor/Outdoor Living:

FAST HOUSE COMMON PITFALLS

1 Awkwardly shaped living room

This living room is an awkward shape and is difficult to properly furnish. The seating turns its back on both the window and the deck, and there is a circulation conflict getting to the terrace door. **A**

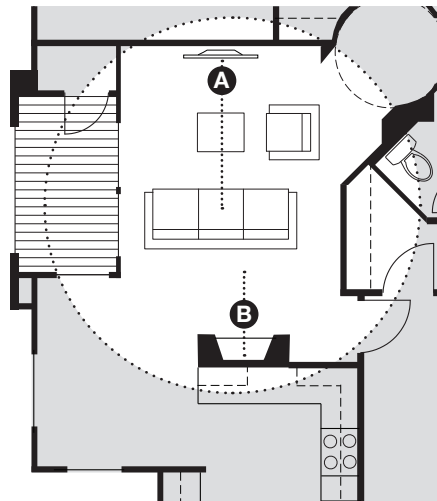
(1242 sq ft condominium, Québec)



2 TV and fireplace on opposite walls

This condominium unit has two focal points in the living room because the television **A** and fireplace **B** are placed on opposite walls. Because this room is not large enough to have two separate furniture groupings, the furniture can only face one of the two focal points.

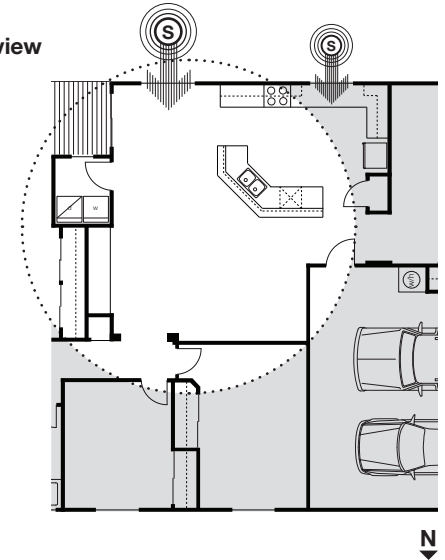
(1130 sq ft condominium, Texas)



3 Interior living space has no sunlight or view

While the large windows in the dining area and kitchen are open to south light, the living space is located in the middle of the plan. The result is that one of the most used spaces in the house will be dark with no visual connection to the outdoors. Also note, that the laundry room opens directly into the principal living space.

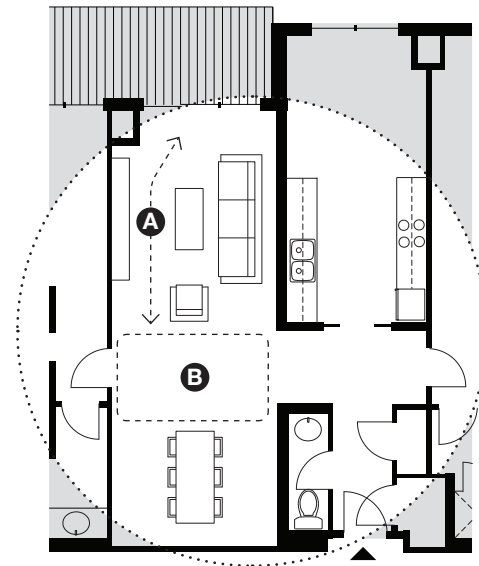
(2699 sq ft single family house, Tennessee)



4 The long and narrow room

The long narrow proportion of the living room in this multifamily unit makes it difficult to furnish and use. The narrow width makes circulation through the furniture grouping **A** difficult and the length of the room creates a considerable amount of wasted space **B** between the living room furniture and the dining area.

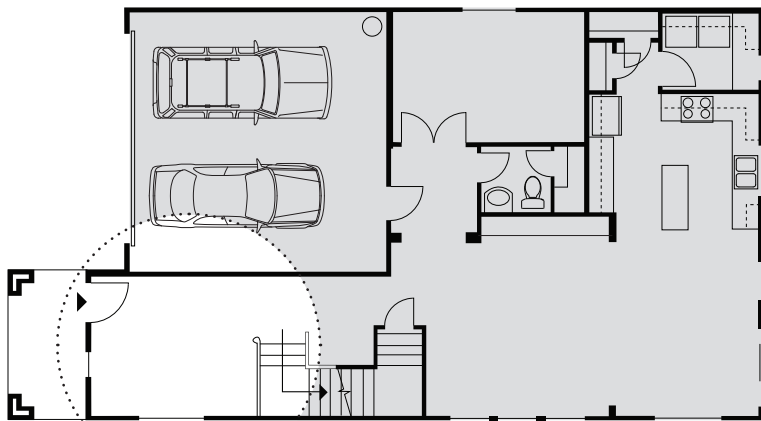
(1413 sq ft condominium, Ontario)



Indoor/Outdoor Living:**THE DEATH OF THE PARLOR**

The living room has undergone a profound transformation in recent years. Up until the 1950's most houses had a formal sitting room located just off the front entry. The historical origins of this room were the parlors of Victorian England. They were spaces for receiving and entertaining guests. The baby boom spawned the development of the main floor family room in the late 1960's. Starting out as an enclosed play room just off the kitchen at the back of the house, by the mid-80's this informal family space had expanded into the "great room" and become the primary living room in the home.

With this shift to a more informal lifestyle, the formal front sitting room has become less and less important. However, out of some strange sense of pretentiousness these now unused rooms continue to be included in the design of many fast houses. Too often, they have become the place where potted plants and your grandmother's furniture go to die. Given the cost of construction and the constraints of ever smaller lot areas, the time has come to eliminate this vestige of the past and concentrate our resources on those parts of the house that we actually use. In this house, the lack of a front entry will result in the parlour being used almost exclusively as an entrance rather than a living space.

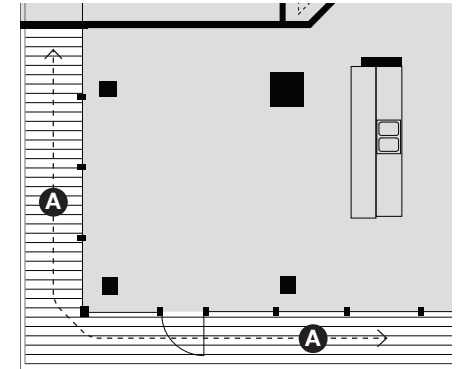


(2850 sq ft single family house, California)

FAST HOUSE COMMON PITFALLS**5 Terrace is too shallow**

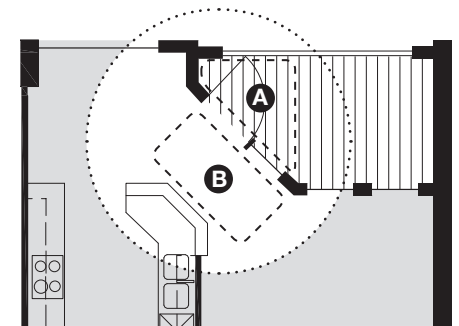
Although the floor area of this terrace is actually quite generous it is only slightly wider than a typical hallway. The result is that furniture placement will be very difficult as the balcony is almost entirely taken up as circulation space. **A**

(832 sq ft condominium, British Columbia)

**6 Angled wall limits terrace space**

The angled wall in this condominium unit reduces the effective area of its terrace by about 30% because the triangular floor area that results **A** cannot be furnished or easily used. Notice how the angled wall also creates wasted space beside the kitchen. **B**

(1548 sq ft condominium, Florida)

**FOCUS ON QUALITY OF SPACE, NOT QUANTITY**

Aside from when we are asleep in our bedrooms, most of the time we spend at home is spent in the main living areas. They are the most intensively used by the most number of people. As such, they need to be the best rooms in the house. This usually means a space that gets the best possible daylight and natural ventilation. It also means a space with a strong and direct connection to an outside terrace or backyard. Get these two elements right and your living space is well on its way to being a joy to live in.