

Open House

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Does anything have just *one* purpose anymore? **Editorial Director Joanna Saltz** talks multifunctional design with five multitasking designers.

Joanna Saltz
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Want to talk? E-mail me at editor@housebeautiful.com.



MA concealed a washing machine in this home office/laundry room.

Joanna Saltz: Spaces seem to work so much harder than they used to. Do the rooms you design these days have to function in more than one way?

Heather Garrett: They have to swing between family life, entertaining, studying, dining, little kids, and big kids. Even a zipped-up office is now a sort of laptopping, loungy space. **I used to hate the open-living idea, because I love to form a dream in each enclosed room.** But people are expecting spaces to flex.

Robert MacNeill: Open concept can be difficult, even alienating, because everybody is kind of bothering each other. But in other ways, it brings people together. I really enjoy that.

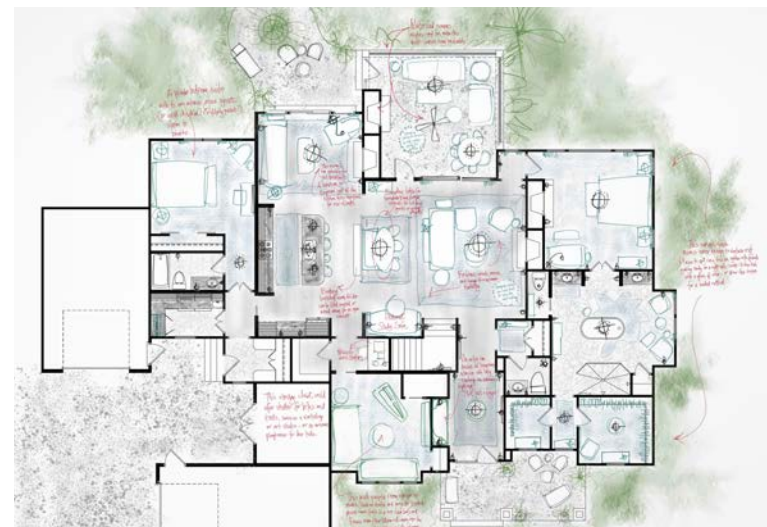
MA Allen: In one home we did, there was a space that could be a study or a formal living room. Because so many people are working off of laptops and tablets, all we needed was a floating table desk, cabinets to store technology, and open bookshelves that gave it that study feel.

Jo: The boundaries we used to know are sort of disintegrating.

Brittney Roux: Right! Lots of my clients want to get back to



Heather Garrett
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The plan for a family home Heather is currently working on addresses changing needs: A first-floor suite has a separate entry "for adult children or elderly parents."

INTERIORS PHOTOGRAPHS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: PHOTO BY ANAGRAM COURTESY OF ROUX MACNEILL STUDIO; PHOTO BY AMBER ROBINSON COURTESY OF SINGLE BUBBLE POP; PHOTO BY JOHN BESSLER COURTESY OF HEATHER GARRETT DESIGN; COURTESY OF MA ALLEN INTERIORS

spaces that are just one function. We recently interviewed someone whose architect had designed a sleeping chamber—there was nothing else going on in that room.

Jo: What's the downside of all these open living spaces?

Robert: What I miss is being able to define a room with something really special; like, one of the most fun things to do in a dining room is put up wallpaper. But in an open floor plan, you can't necessarily find a great starting point and stopping point, so you just paint the whole downstairs of the house neutral.

MA: I'm Southern, I like to entertain—I can't give up my formal dining room!

Heather: It's so funny that you say that, because clients of mine are asking to eliminate



For their design studio, Robert and Brittney made a custom table to serve as desk, lunch table, and presentation space.

the dining room altogether. I have raised two teenagers in a 1,500-square-foot loft space, and we don't have one. At their dad's house, however, they've always had this very large formal dining room—and they love it. They enjoy eating there; it feels special to them.

Robert MacNeill and Brittney Roux, Roux MacNeill Studio
@rouxmacstudio



Niki McNeill: That's how my family is, too: We have 90-year-olds and we have babies, and in reality, you can't accommodate 20 to 30 people in a formal dining room. **You wind up spreading out throughout the home, so you want your spaces to be able to accommodate big groups.**

Jo: That's so true. So as designers, you guys are like the ultimate multitaskers. What's your favorite (or least favorite) role?

Niki: I love the psychology of working with a new client. Maybe it's a husband and wife—in those initial conversa-

"As more houses succumb to open floor plans, people want their own 'away' spaces: rooms to serve just one purpose."

—BRITTNEY ROUX

tions, they're learning about each other. "Oh, I never knew you didn't like that! I thought you said you wanted a bed in the other room!" I love figuring out those differences, and then finding a solution that everyone's excited about.

Robert: Confidant. It sounds trite, but the relationships we form are so rewarding. I mean, you're picking out their *toilet*—it's very personal. Like, do you want a bidet?

Heather: I hate dealing with the money. I delegate breaking bad news to someone else in my office!

Niki: It's my least favorite part—telling someone they have Champagne taste on a beer budget.

MA: Yeah, I get bogged down and worried that I'm asking someone to splurge too much on this or that.

Jo: We get that in media all the time, too. Creatives and money don't mix.

Niki McNeill
@nikimcneill



In this bedroom by Niki, a hidden storage unit is tucked under the mattress platform.