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Architect's advice – little things that make your home work

In these tough economic times, one thing on the North Shore remains constant: homes are still damn expensive. Many of us live in older houses that weren't built to support today's lifestyles, and space is often tight. I spent many winter evenings huddled by a drafty 85 year-old window, dreaming of a walk-in closet and a double vanity sink. Whether you're considering building a new home or just sprucing up the one you've got, [architect Charles Cook](#) has some tips about how to get the most out of your space.

"A house is a machine and should reflect an efficient living process," says Cook, who has been designing homes on the North Shore for over 22 years. To him, it's important that a house reflect the personality of its owners, but also that it does its job. And despite our yearning for square footage, sometimes it's the little things that make all the difference.

Put technology in it's place. The home computer is as necessary to daily life as the old calendar on the fridge or the phonebook drawer. Cook often places a desk or workstation in or near the kitchen, the hub of family living. He also copes with ipods and cell phones and their tangle of cords by designing well concealed cubbies with power outlets and compartments for pocket stuff like keys and wallets.



Organize the entryways. Hard winters, detached garages, busy kids and pets mean lots of dirt and gear coming through the door. Cook designs mud rooms (below left) with easily accessible storage to keep belongings handy but out of sight, leaving the rest of the house clear of clutter.

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ABOUT ME

I'm a 40-something mother, wife and writer who took a long unexpected gig as a stay-at-home mom in the Chicago suburbs which, to my surprise, I liked. In addition to spending quality time with my two kids, staying home gave me time to hang out on the North Shore, act in community theatre, sing in a band, host a local-access cable TV show and go back to school. Now I'm relaunching my career as a writer. I have another blog about life after 40, and am a regular contributor to local magazines and newspapers. I look forward to bringing stories from my neighborhood to yours.

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Followers: 26
Contributor Since: July 2009
Location: Wilmette, IL - on Chicago's North Shore

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WHAT I'M UP TO

Divorced & Dating

I'm doing a series on dating after divorce for my blog about life after 40 called [Forty Fabulous](#). Whether you're single for the second time or happily married, it will make you rethink your relationship (and there's some good dirt too.)

Green is good. As a LEED certified architect, Cook is on top of the latest energy and environmental design principals. He says even small changes, like moving to light switches that are light and motion sensitive, can make a big impact on energy bills. And buying locally produced materials (within 500 miles) such as cabinets and flooring, is much better for the environment.

Ceilings deserve attention too. Homeowners often neglect one of the biggest surfaces in their homes. "A room always feels more comfortable when there's detail in the ceiling" says Cook, who uses beams, moldings and varying heights to break up the dull, flat surface and add warmth and balance to rooms.

Whether you're building your dream home or just redoing your kitchen, bigger is not always better. Pay attention to the details and you'll end up with a home that really works.

To learn more about Charles Cook, visit his website: www.cookarchitectural.com

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