

Getting

Adorning floors and furnishings with dappled designs and evolving patterns, natural light alternately bursts onto the scene and creeps softly into the consciousness. A favored architect's tool, it imbues spaces with warmth and brightness in its own one-of-a-kind way.

When regional architects like Becky Swanston of Swanston & Associates, Inc. speak of residential remodeling and room design, their focus often fluctuates between optimizing functionality and improving the aesthetics of a given space. They're all about maximizing the enjoyment and appreciation of homes while aligning square footages with family needs.

Yet, Swanston notes, a room that is equipped to respond to or draw upon the availability of natural light is equally important — and potentially pleasing — even though it is an oft-neglected component of remodeling projects.

"The proportions of a space are obviously crucial," she says, "but light has such an impact on that, and the quantity of the light that comes into the space and the quality of it are almost as important as how the space lays out."

As such, Swanston finds it disappointing and even distressing when homeowners don't make use of windows and orient structures to coordinate with the availability of light. In other words, in an effort to cut corners, "they scrim on windows."

"Because we do so much value engineering today, the subject of the windows comes up every time," she says. "Construction costs have gotten so high that people are always looking for ways to lower their overall expenses, but reducing windows is a big mistake."

Time and time again, Swanston says affluent clients who hire her to design large, beautiful homes for them perceive both interior and exterior windows as an expendable expense. But, she says, glass features should be plentiful.

"In an interior space, a glass wall helps transfer light to another room," she explains, adding that such reflective components use "borrowed light," reflecting off masonry and other elements and making rooms look larger. And with urban houses and less-than-ideal property views, many folks overlook the potential of exterior windows "because their views aren't so great," but Swanston says they're missing the point — and the possibilities. "Sometimes it's not about the views," she says. "It's the quality of the light and the notion of expanding the space beyond its walls."

How walls of windows and similar features are styled depends on the orientation of the spaces, Swanston adds. "For instance, if you have a western exposure, you might restrict the sun exposure a bit because you want to protect yourself from the glare of the sun at the end of the day," she says. However, that protection might come in the form of awnings and exterior shade structures placed over the abundant windows rather than restrictions on either their volume or size.

Quite simply, she adds, windows make all the difference. **sah**



Two views of area urban homes designed by Swanston & Associates display the soft and nuanced effects of windows and architectural glass. **ABOVE:** A residential upstairs entry is infused with light. **RIGHT:** walls of glass prove that windows are more about the light than the views.

Photography above by Eric Salsbery. Photography at right by David Livingston.

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LETTING IN
THE LIGHT

