



What's in a Door?

The doors in our house are not your typical doors. Sure, they function like traditional doors - serving as a threshold, and at times barrier, between two rooms. However, the doors in our house do not have the rectangular shape found in other homes. Rather, the openings are framed with curved sides. Needless to say, when we built our house a decade ago, we couldn't go down to the local hardware store and purchase doors off the shelf.

I realized this when I designed the openings, knowing that the doors would need to be made by hand. So, I made a point to design the layout of rooms in our house, with as few doors as possible. To cut down on expense and primarily time, since I would likely be making them myself. The *'few doors as possible'* worked out – we ended up with only five for the whole house, closets and all. But, the *'making them myself'* didn't quite work out, five years after moving in we were still living with curtains hanging in the doorways.

Our oldest son recently became a teenager, so I felt he would soon need a door on his bedroom, to give him a sense of privacy during the times he would like to get away from his younger brother. Surely a curtain is not as easily slammed as a door, not that we are trying to encourage slamming doors. Yet, for his birthday I told him, if he designed a door, I would help him built it. It wasn't long and he had a drawing, complete with sliding peek holes, hidden flaps for roaming robots to venture out and of course, a lock.

The exterior doors for our house are no different. In fact, our front door was the first thing I designed when creating our house - an asymmetric French door, one leaf larger than the other, also with curved sides. Because so, the hinges needed to be made by hand much like those on a circular bank vault, the doors swinging away from the wall when open. It took some time for me to convince my carpenter I was serious about building it. It is no easy feat making something so unusual.

If there is a place in a house that justifies a little extra time and money spent to make something special, it would be the front door. This is the hood ornament for a house. The first thing a guest experiences when arriving, setting the stage for everything that follows inside. This is why I began by designing the front door on our own house and typically the place I start on the houses for my clients.

Much thought goes into the design of a front door, the size, orientation, materials, hinging, handling. What I have come to realize from such pondering is that, the suburban front door has changed over the years in the way it is used. In the city, where lot sizes are narrow and alleys often absent, the front is the primary means to get in and out of the house. In suburbia, the front door is reserved only for guests and the occasional package delivery.

This raises a question - if a door is only used to greet guests, answered from inside, what is the need for a key entry on the outside? A woodworker I know once said that manufactured hardware rarely compliments the design of a custom made door. I would agree with that comment and therefore on my last house, we left the keyed lock off the exterior. Its absence showcased the beautiful craftsmanship on a door less cluttered and made the handle set that much more distinctive.

That same woodworker, ended up making the master bedroom door for my own house. Taking his comment even further, realizing the door to a bedroom is only closed and opened from inside, we decided to leave the handle off the outside all together. And by doing so, the design of the door is displayed in full glory, without hardware trimmings to detract visually from the wood joinery, grain, and surface treatment.

This is not to say that in designing doors, everything should be thrown out the window. As with designing anything, I begin by questioning how things came to be the way they are today. Whether I am dealing with a front door or the house as a whole. After some understanding of its original intent and how characteristics have refined over time, I am able to separate the elements that work well from the ones that have lost their functionality, efficiency, integrity. Then I am ready to sketch an idea, keeping the aspects that still work, while trying something new for the things that don't. What results, I hope, is more than just something different from the standard. But an improvement, enhancing the things we live with daily and thereby our quality of life.

For our own house, that of course remains to be seen. It was an experiment, to see if raising a family in a home that questions conventions will make kids more attuned to their surroundings, more inclined to question status quo, and ultimately more willing to take control of their own environment to create a happier place to live. Check back in a couple years and I will let you know how that turned out. In the meantime, at least our oldest son has a lock on his door, for when his father is just too much.

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