

# Spaces in New Homes

Special Studies March 14, 2019

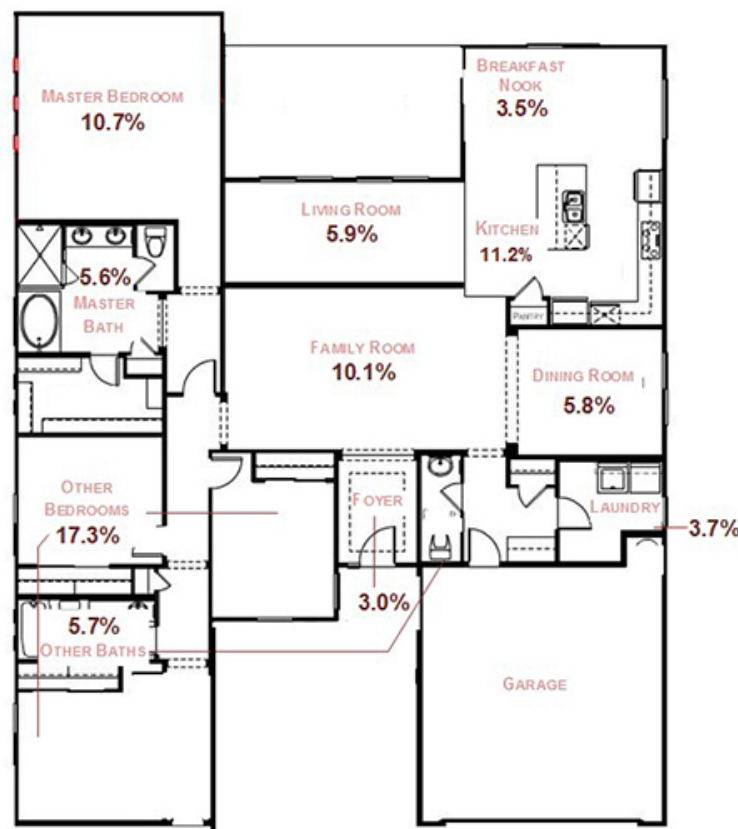
By Paul Emrath, Ph.D.

NAHB Economics and Housing Policy Group

Report available to the public as a courtesy of [HousingEconomics.com](http://HousingEconomics.com)

Data from a recent NAHB survey show that bedrooms account for 28.0 percent of the finished floor space (11.3 percent for the master bedroom, 17.3 percent for all other bedrooms) in the average new home. Other spaces accounting for significant shares include the kitchen (11.2 percent) and family area (10.1 percent). More of the percentage breakdown is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. HOW SPACE IS DISTRIBUTED IN THE AVERAGE NEW HOME



Note: floor plan is shown for purposes of illustration only; percentages are not intended to match the geometric areas in the diagram perfectly. Some spaces (for hallways closets, etc.) are not shown on the figure.

Source: survey for the NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index, November 2018

The percentages are based on responses to special questions on the [NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index](#) survey for November of 2018. The questions covered 13 specific types of areas or rooms, plus a catch-all “other” category for any types not on the list, and asked builders to estimate the percentage of the total square footage of their typical home devoted to each area.<sup>1</sup> A total of 153 single-family builders provided complete and internally consistent responses that could be used to calculate averages.

The average size of the homes was about 2,913 square feet of finished floor spaced—larger than the 2,631 square feet in average [single-family homes completed](#) in 2017 (which includes a percentage of [single-family townhomes](#)).

Hence, the percentages discussed above mean that builders allocate an average of 815 square feet of space to bedrooms (312 of which is for a master bedroom), 326 square feet to a kitchen area, and 295 square feet to a family room or area in the typical new home. Also on average, 332 square feet (11.4 percent) is allocated to “other” finished space (Table 1).<sup>2</sup> When asked what gets included in “other,” builders most often said hallways, followed by a wide variety of variously described extra rooms.

**Table 1. Average Allocation of Space in New Homes**

	Small Homes (under 2,000 sq ft)		Overall Average for All Homes		Large Homes (3,500 sq ft plus)	
	Sq Ft	Pct	Sq Ft	Pct	Sq Ft	Pct
Master Bedroom	223	13.1%	312	10.7%	422	9.2%
Other Bedrooms	285	16.7%	503	17.3%	791	17.3%
Master Bathroom	112	6.5%	164	5.6%	240	5.2%
Other Bathrooms	83	4.9%	166	5.7%	300	6.6%
Kitchen	218	12.7%	326	11.2%	479	10.5%
Breakfast Nook	53	3.1%	101	3.5%	157	3.4%
Walk-in Pantry	33	1.9%	76	2.6%	137	3.0%
Dining Room/Area	104	6.1%	170	5.8%	266	5.8%
Living Room/Area	171	10.0%	173	5.9%	200	4.4%
Family Room/Area	140	8.2%	295	10.1%	446	9.8%
Laundry Room/Area	61	3.5%	98	3.4%	158	3.5%
Entry Foyer	43	2.5%	86	3.0%	146	3.2%
Study/Den/Library	29	1.7%	110	3.8%	212	4.6%
Other Finished Space	155	9.1%	332	11.4%	614	13.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,708</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,913</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>4,569</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

In answer to a separate question, builders reported that their typical new homes contained an average of 79 square feet of closet space. About half of the time, they also included closet space in the size estimates they provided for other areas of the home.

### **Space in Large and Small Homes**

In addition to an average breakdown of space across all new homes, Table 1 also shows average breakdowns for small (with under 2,000 square feet) and large (with at least 3,500 square feet) new homes.<sup>3</sup> As the table shows, the master bedroom accounts for a larger share of the space in small new homes than in large ones (13.1 vs. 9.2 percent, on average). Other bedrooms (those not part of a master suite), however, account for roughly 17 percent of the finished floor space in both large and small new homes.

Bathrooms in aggregate account for between 11 and 12 percent of the finished floor space in both the large and small new homes. In the large homes, however, a smaller share is allocated to the master bath (5.2 percent, compared to 6.5 percent

for the small homes), and more to other baths (6.6 vs. 4.9 percent). This is not surprising, given that larger homes may have more baths as well as larger ones.

The kitchen accounts for a somewhat greater share of space in small homes (12.7 percent of the finished area vs. 10.5 percent in large homes), but this tendency does not hold for breakfast nooks and walk-in pantries. The share of space allocated to nooks and pantries is actually somewhat higher in larger homes.

The share of space allocated to many of the areas listed in the survey, varies only slightly with overall home size. The dining area, for example, accounts for close to 6 percent of the finished floor space in both large and small new homes. The greatest percentage-point gap appears in the living room or area, which accounts for 10.0 percent of the space in the small new homes compared to only 4.4 percent in the large ones.

### **Incidence and Size of Rooms**

Table 1 shows the average allocation of space across all homes, whether or not the homes contain a particular type of space. If a home lacks a study/den/library, for example, that home is included in the average where it is counted as having zero square feet in a study/den/library area. Some readers may also be interested on how often builders provide specific types of rooms and how big the rooms are, when they are provided. Table 2 shows the incidence of particular rooms and the size of these rooms when they exist. Table 2 reports average incidence and space allocated only for the areas that constitute distinct rooms (separated from other areas in the home by walls). Areas not separated from each other are added together and shown as a separate "great" room. Again, results for large and small new homes are shown in addition to overall averages.

**Table 2. Space Dedicated to Specific Rooms, When Present**

	Small Homes (< 2,000 sq ft)		All Homes		Large Homes (3,500 sq ft+)	
	Share of Homes with the Room	Average Size of Room(s) (sq ft)	Share of Homes with the Room	Average Size of Room(s) (sq ft)	Share of Homes with the Room	Average Size of Room(s) (sq ft)
Master Bedroom	100.0%	223	100.0%	312	100.0%	422
Other Bedrooms	100.0%	285	100.0%	503	100.0%	791
Master Bathroom	100.0%	112	99.3%	165	97.6%	246
Other Bathrooms	96.8%	86	96.1%	173	100.0%	300
Kitchen	74.2%	195	70.6%	288	63.4%	424
Breakfast Nook	35.5%	126	49.7%	155	56.1%	214
Walk-in Pantry	51.6%	63	71.2%	102	85.4%	151
Dining Room	58.1%	139	64.1%	209	75.6%	294
Living Room	35.5%	272	37.3%	343	39.0%	421
Family Room	38.7%	302	55.6%	398	65.9%	484
Laundry Room	83.9%	72	93.5%	104	97.6%	162
Entry Foyer	77.4%	46	90.2%	90	97.6%	141
Study/Den/Library	22.6%	128	59.5%	185	92.7%	229
Great Room*	35.5%	570	37.3%	827	39.0%	1,199

Notes: \*Great Room is a combination of any of the spaces listed in Table 1, except beds and baths. Table 1 is an average allocation of spaces across all homes, including homes that do not have the space. Table 2 reports average square footage only for areas that exist as distinct, separate rooms, and only for the homes that have that particular type of room. If the home has more than one of a particular type of room, as would often be the case for "other bedrooms," Table 2 reports aggregate square footage for all rooms of that type.

The only types of rooms present in 100 percent of the builders' typical new homes are master bedrooms and other bedrooms. Although all the new homes also have at least one bathroom, in rare cases the home has only something the builder classifies as a master bath, or only baths that are not part of a master suite. Every new home also contains a kitchen area, but it is common for this area to be open to other parts of the home, so only 70.6 percent of the homes have a kitchen the builder reports as a distinct, separate room. The only other rooms present in over 90 percent of the homes are the laundry room and the entry foyer. A laundry room is also the home feature most often rated essential by recent and prospective buyers in NAHB's recent publication [What Home Buyers Really Want, 2019 Edition](#).

Not surprisingly, builders tend to provide most types of rooms more often in larger homes. The most extreme example is the study/den/library, which is present in 92.7 percent of new homes with at least 3,500 square feet of finished space, compared to only 22.6 percent of homes with less than 2,000 square feet. The only significant tendency in the opposite direction is the kitchen, which is present as a completely separate room in 63.4 percent of large new homes compared to 74.2 percent of small ones. Again, when not counted as a room, a kitchen area is nevertheless present but counted as part of a great room.

Befitting its name, the great room tends to be the largest of the rooms, averaging over 800 square feet across all new homes in the sample. Excluding the space allocated to other (i.e., non-master) bedrooms (which is often spread across more than one room), the second largest room is the family room, which when present averages just under 400 square feet.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that, in all cases, the average room size is greater in larger new homes. Compared to their counterparts in the small new homes (those with under 2,500 square feet of finished space), entry foyers, walk-in pantries, laundry rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, and great rooms are each over twice as large on average in new homes with at least 3,500 square feet. The difference is more than three-to-one in the average size of entry foyers, which is 141 square feet in large new homes vs. 46 square feet in small ones.

### **Combined Spaces**

Historically, a space designed for a specific purpose was called a room, and it was generally understood that this meant an area separated from others in the home by complete walls, except for normal size doors and doorways. But this definition is not always applicable now, as open designs have proliferated and spaces in homes are now routinely separated either not at all, or by various combinations of partial walls, counters, arches, cabinets, bookcases, columns etc. For that reason, the NAHB survey first asked builders about how space was allocated to various areas of

the home, then considered whether or not any of these areas were combined into a larger room.

A fashionable term for such combined-use spaces is great room, but this is not a consistently well-defined concept. Sometimes the term great is reserved for a room with a very specific combination of uses, or for a large room with a high ceiling. Table 2 takes a broad and generally applicable approach, using “great” for rooms that combine any of the areas (other than beds and baths) listed in the survey. Table 3 shows how often these combined-use rooms contain the different categories of spaces.

**Table 3. Composition of Combination-Use/Great Rooms**  
 How Often Various Types of Spaces Are Included

	Small Homes (<2,000 sq ft)	All Homes	Large Homes (3,500 sq ft+)
Kitchen Area	72.7%	77.2%	93.8%
Family Area	54.5%	64.9%	75.0%
Breakfast Nook	54.5%	61.4%	62.5%
Dining Area	63.6%	57.9%	56.3%
Living Area	54.5%	47.4%	31.3%
Pantry	27.3%	26.3%	25.0%
Entry Foyer	27.3%	12.3%	6.3%
Study/Den/Library Area	9.1%	3.5%	0.0%
Laundry Area	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Other	9.1%	3.5%	6.3%

As the table shows, every possible category was reported as being included in the typical great room by some builder, although only a very small share of the new-home great rooms (1.8 percent) included a laundry area. The most common type of space included was the kitchen area (present in 77.2 percent of the combined-use rooms), followed by a family area (64.9 percent), breakfast nook (61.4 percent) and dining area (57.9 percent).

Kitchen and family areas are found particularly often in the great rooms of larger new homes. In the NAHB survey, 93.8 percent of the combined-use rooms of homes with at least 3,500 square feet included a kitchen area, and 75.0 percent

included a family area—compared to 72.7 and 54.5 percent, respectively, in the great rooms of homes with less than 2,500 square feet.

In contrast, entry foyers are included in only 6.3 percent of combined-use rooms in the large new homes, compared to 27.3 percent in the small ones. Similarly, living areas are included in 31.3 percent of combined-use rooms in the large homes, compared to a considerably greater 54.5 percent in the small ones.

A [previous article](#) provided detail on how areas are separated from each other in new homes, and compared it to how home buyers say they want the areas separated. The information on how buyers want the areas separated was updated very recently in [What Home Buyers Really Want, 2019 Edition](#).

---

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the questionnaire is available in the “Additional Resources” box that appears at the top of the online version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Table 1 is constructed by computing first the square footage of type of space, then the average square footage for each type, then summing these average sizes, and finally constructing a percentage distribution based on these results. This ensures that both the square footages and percentages in the table sum to the bottom-line totals.

<sup>3</sup> The cut-offs at 2,000 and 3,500 square feet were chosen based on the lower and upper quartiles of the distribution of home sizes in the survey.