

## Good transitions improve a room

**E**ntrances, hallways, and alcoves often are overlooked in a home, which is unfortunate. The passage, or transition, into any space in a house determines how the room will be experienced. No matter how well planned the interior of a room, the design will fall flat if the room's entry hasn't been considered carefully.

In architecture, transitions are organizational elements that help to define spaces and to control the sequence of movement through a house. Without transitions, the rooms in a house may blend together and seemingly become one large space. A buffer between different realms, transitions provide a place to pause and adjust. When we feel that there is something more beyond the sightlines, a small house feels much bigger. Creating a hallway or a lowered ceiling at a doorway separates spaces so that they don't bleed together. These strategies also create a human scale in larger houses by limiting the things that we see and sense, preventing us from feeling overwhelmed.

### Creating a buffer

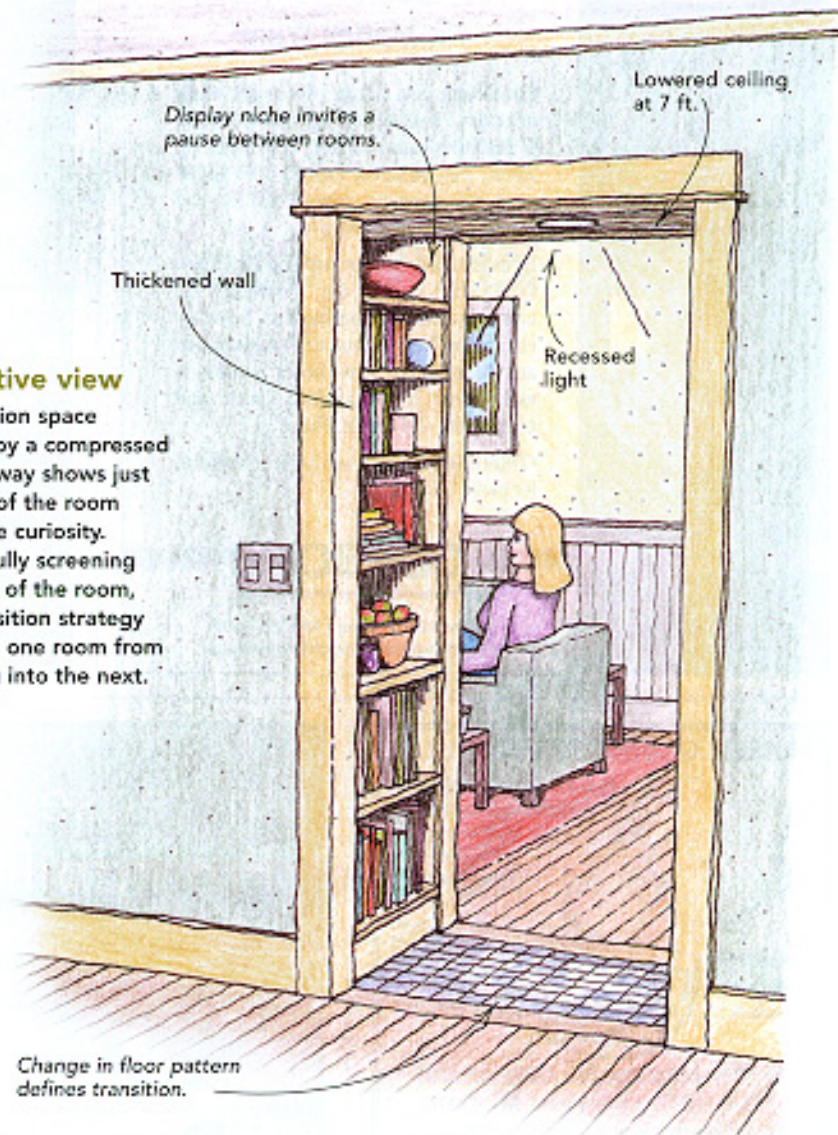
There should be a transition any time there is a connection between two different activity areas in a house. For instance, quiet areas such as a home office, study, or library need insulation from more active areas. One strategy to accomplish this is to create a transition space with thickened walls and a low ceiling. By compressing the transition space, we have to squeeze through it before we are released into the larger space, making it feel more open and grand. Frank Lloyd Wright was a master at this design trick, which takes advantage of the fact

that our senses exaggerate the difference between two heights.

Another important role for transitions is to signal the boundary between public and private spaces. One common need for this transition is at the threshold between a hallway and a bedroom. A well-designed transition here provides a cue and the space to shift from the home's public realm to the privacy of the bedroom. I like to create an alcove by recessing the door 2 ft. 6 in. and lowering the ceiling to 7 ft., which promotes a feeling of privacy and separation as people move through the extended threshold (drawing p. 128). By flanking the recessed

### Seductive view

A transition space formed by a compressed passageway shows just enough of the room to arouse curiosity. By carefully screening the view of the room, this transition strategy prevents one room from bleeding into the next.



entry with a closet, I don't lose any floor space, and the closet helps to buffer sound from outside the bedroom.

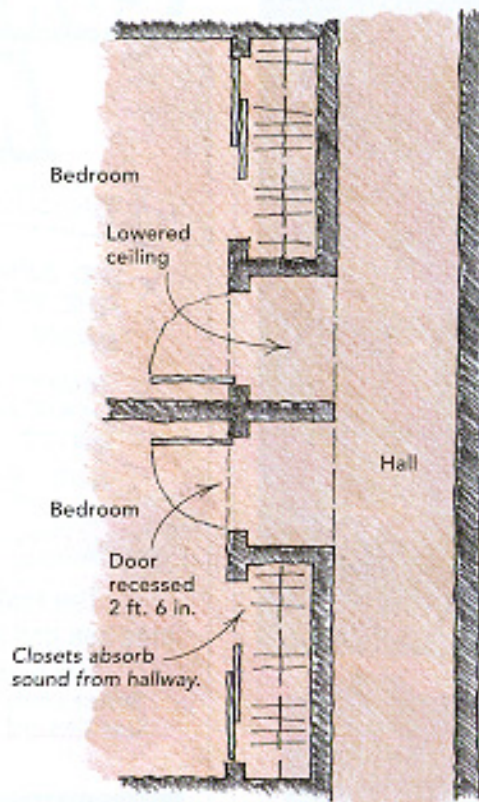
### Defining space in an open plan

Open floor plans need transitions to signify different areas. One of the most common open floor plans is a combination living/dining area, but the distinction between the areas often is only an imagined line in the homeowner's mind. Meaningful transitions need definition and distinct form. Depending on whether you are working with an existing space, an addition, or new construction, these transitions can be accomplished

by using different flooring materials, changing the orientation of floor coverings, and changing floor levels as well as varying ceiling heights and using beams and half-walls.

Contrasting the floor material and/or creating a floor-pattern change marks a threshold and signifies a different space. With new construction, incorporating a level change between the living and dining areas clearly defines each space. The steps function as a threshold from one space to the other. Be careful using only one step. It is a dangerous tripping hazard unless the two surfaces are differentiated by materials or patterns. Also, if there are more than two steps (risers), a handrail is required by code.

It is possible to delineate different areas and still keep an open feel in an existing room by using wall and/or ceiling elements to form transitions in large open spaces. Adding a beam or soffit not only signifies a different space, but on a smaller scale, it also serves to create a sense of compression and



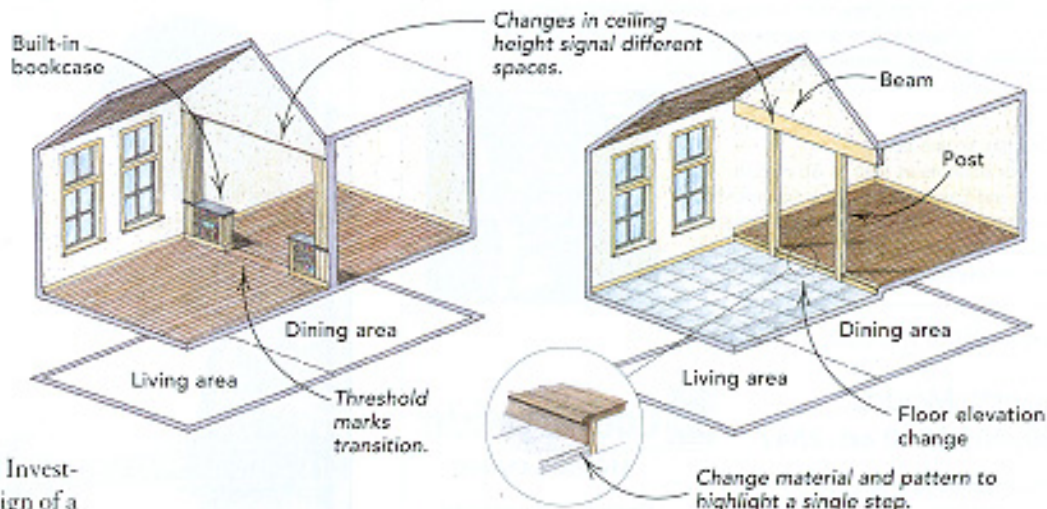
### Closets help to buffer the bedrooms

The transition from hallway to bedroom should indicate the end of public space in the house and the beginning of private space. Placing a closet along the shared hallway wall allows for a deep threshold without wasting floor space inside the bedroom. Lowering the ceiling in this transition space makes the bedroom seem more open and airy.

expansion between the two spaces. If the ceilings are high enough, you can drop the ceiling height in one area. Half-walls, railings, shelves, niches, columns, and built-in bookcases also help to define space for a certain activity while keeping open sightlines through the larger room.

Even with an open floor plan, transitions that define different spaces provide a sequence of discovery and enhance the experience of a home. Investing in transitions improves the design of a house and is especially important in making a small house live large.

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### Open floor plans need transitions, too

An imaginary line is all that divides the living and dining areas in many open floor plans. Changes in flooring material or elevation are two methods to define a particular area within a larger space. Half-walls, built-in storage, columns, beams, and dropped ceilings are additional methods of defining the living or dining space while still keeping the open plan's sightlines and sense of space.