BUILDING BY STAGES

THIS is the third of four articles by JOHN G. SOWERBY, A.R.I.B.A., A.I.L.A., one of the prize-winners in the recent competition, sponsored by the Government, for the design of a three-bedroom home.

THERE has recently been much discussion on the possibility of "building your own home." A small number of New Zealanders have indeed done so, apart, of course, from work done by specialist tradesmen. Perhaps an ever greater number have begun building, but have found the task too difficult and have been forced, after months of hard work, to call in a professional builder.

The amateur home builder has many difficulties to overcome. Finance is hard to obtain. Lack of training in the use of tools and building methods means wastage of materials and time, and may result in a badly-constructed house which would be difficult to sell if the need arose. Working hours are limited and the house may take several years to complete, during which time the home-builder may be paying excessive rent for temporary accommodation. Materials on the site may be damaged or stolen, and so on.

A trained carpenter is in a much more favourable position, and in his case many of the disadvantages mentioned above would not apply.

Details of various training schemes for amateur builders have recently been announced in several localities. Although these may help to overcome some of the present disadvantages, the building of one's own home will always remain a formidable proposition, not to be lightly undertaken.

I have prepared the design in this week's article with the object of overcoming some of the disadvantages. It is intended primarily for young married couples.

The house is designed for erection in two or more stages, and the suggested procedure is as follows: Stage 1, which has a floor area of only 540 square feet, is erected by a builder and occupied immediately by the couple, thus saving any further outlay on rent. The accommodation comprises a living room, bedroom, bathroom and separate w.c., and although small, is superior in every respect to many bed-sitting room flats in Wellington, for which weekly rents of £5 and upwards are being demanded. The washing machine and one tub are accommodated in the kitchen. If preferred, the curtain shown between the bedroom and the living room could be replaced by a wall. This stage includes all the drainage and plumbing in the complete scheme.

WHEN the need for extension arises, stage two is carried out by the owner, who in the meantime has been attending one of the proposed building courses. This stage adds the final bedrooms, which are the easiest part of the house to build, and after his training course the owner should have very little trouble in their construction. He would have the enormous advantage of living on the job, so that time would not be wasted on travelling. Even odd half-hours could profitably be used. The original bedroom becomes a dining space directly connected with the kitchen. If desired, only bedrooms one and two could be built at first, and bedroom three added later. Alternatively, bedroom one could first be built followed by bedrooms two and three. If the latter alternative were adopted, the wall between bedroom one and the passage space could be omitted until the final bedrooms were added. This would make the bedroom considerably larger for the time being. These alternatives would probably be more convenient than adding all the bedrooms at the same time, but would increase the total cost of the ultimate scheme.

It is considered that this scheme of extension from a minimum house erected by a builder would be a feasible proposition for a large number of New Zealanders. When the saving in rent due to immediate occupation is considered, the completed scheme would probably cost very little more than if the owner had succeeded in building the whole house himself. It should be noted that much of the work in the first stage, such as the drainage, plumbing, kitchen fittings, etc., could not in any case be carried out by the owner. There is little doubt that the workmanship would be of a higher standard, and this would increase the value of the finished house.

IN all such expansion schemes, detailed plans covering all future extensions must be prepared before the original portion of the house is built. Haphazard extension almost invariably results in an inconvenient layout, and much demolition work may be necessary before the extension can proceed. A long-term plan can avoid this and achieve economy in several ways. The builder can, for example, frame up for doorways to be formed in any wall at a later date. Temporary materials can sometimes be used. Better use can always be made of floor area. The roof type should be carefully considered, as some types are expensive to extend. This problem should be discussed with the builder and the costs of the various alternatives compared.

External walls which later become internal partitions in the final scheme can be sheathed with flat asbestos. This material is very much cheaper than weatherboards as an external wall lining, and is also reasonably satisfactory as an internal wall lining. Another possible material for use in this way is hardboard.

A point which is seldom considered is that both the living and bedroom accommodation should be extended, and not only the bedroom space. Obviously a house accommodating five or six people requires more living space than one which has bedroom accommodation for only two people. In the design printed, this is arranged by using the dining space as a bedroom in the first stage.

LET us now return to the subject of economical internal planning, which readers will remember was discussed in last week's article.

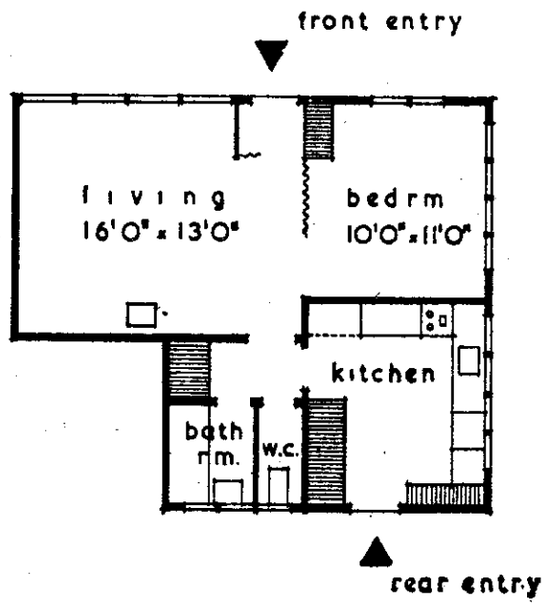
For really small houses a possibility which is worth considering is a plan with only one entrance. This is, of course, the arrangement normally used in flats, where it works satisfactorily. The entrance should be carefully placed between the kitchen and living room, so as to be easily accessible from both rooms. If this is done, the arrangement has no serious disadvantages, and it is a matter of personal preference whether or not these outweigh the financial saving. This could easily be almost £100, as path length, steps, porch, one external door and circulation space are saved.

For two-bedroom houses a combined bathroom and w.c. is satisfactory, but for larger houses a separate w.c. is to be preferred. This again is a matter of personal preference, but the combined arrangement is much more economical. About six feet of partition, one door and one window are immediately saved, and the fittings can be arranged in slightly less floor area. It often happens, however, that a separate w.c. is somewhat awkward to arrange in the plan, and results in the overall floor area being considerably increased, possibly by as much as 25 square feet. The plan to be shown in next week's article is an example of this.

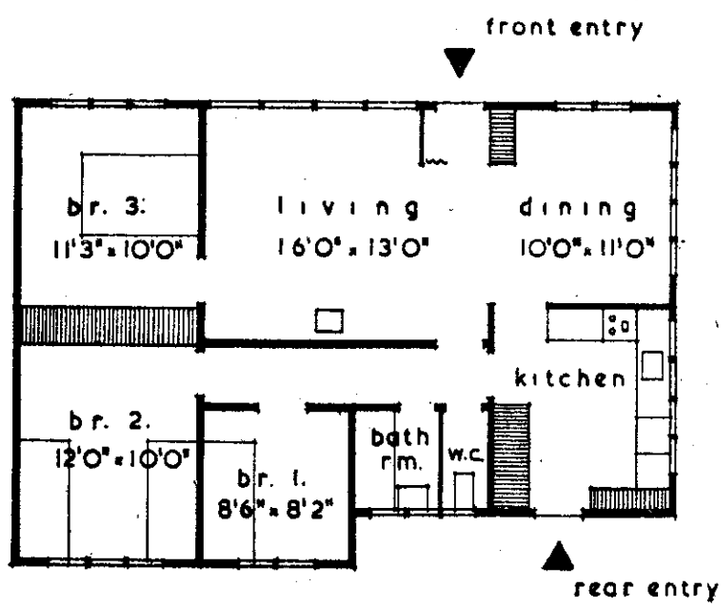
FLOOR space within rooms should not be wasted. The positions of doors, windows, electric light and power points, joinery fittings and the fireplace should be carefully considered and not merely arranged anywhere. An ill-considered position can easily waste floor space, or fail to make best use of it, by rendering furniture arrangement difficult. In order to avoid this, at least one furniture layout should be prepared for each room. This is particularly important in the case of the bedrooms, and bed positions should always be shown on the plan. The importance of a simple rectangular shape for all rooms was emphasised in the first article.

Wherever possible, divisions between the various rooms should be formed by cupboards and other storage units, as these are cheaper to install than a normal wall plus the cost of furniture bought at retail prices. This was well illustrated in the plan published last week. The storage units can either be the full height of the room as a normal wall, or stop at a lower height to divide the space while allowing the ceiling to continue over. This ceiling continuity increases the apparent size of the rooms.

Finally, before leaving the subject of planning, it must be emphasised that space can be saved by good design. A well-planned house of 900 square feet can provide better accommodation than a badly-planned one of 1000 square feet.



stage 1



stage 2