

ROOFLINES

BY MARIANNE CUSATO

The Age of the McMansion is fading, and with it, its signature design element—the complex roofline. With the resurgence of walkable neighborhoods, rooflines have been given permission to calm down. When you travel through tree-lined streets on foot or in a slow-moving car, the first elements of the home that you see are on the ground floor. So the preference is to spend money there, where you can touch and feel the results, rather than on the roof, where there is no value added to the living experience.

McMansions are designed from the floor plan up. Only once the design is locked in is the roofline considered. The result is a footprint that is difficult to cover, forcing the roof to conceal a poorly planned design.

To achieve a clean roofline, design your home from the roof down. Before spending any amount of time on the floor plan, set out the volumes of the home. Take care to make sure the secondary and tertiary volumes do not overwhelm the primary mass of the building. This can be difficult as the design process progresses and you find you need a few more feet here and there, but is worth the effort when you get it right.

Always match the slope of the roof between different sides of the same roof volume. It's tempting to cheat the slopes to make the design work in elevation on paper, but the built result will fall flat. One way to double-check that the roof slopes match is to make sure all of the valleys run at 45° to the eave and ridge.

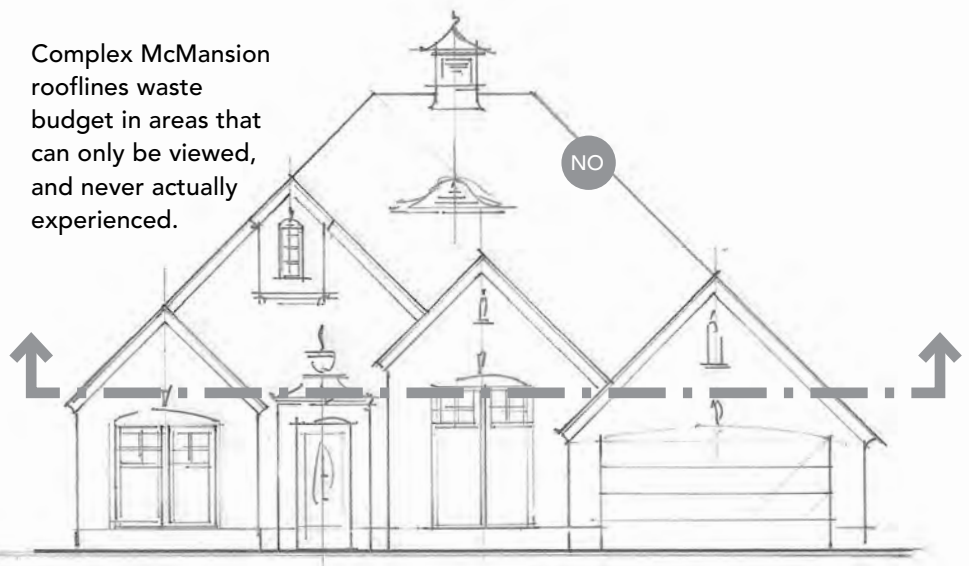
Marianne Cusato is the author of *Get Your House Right: Architectural Elements to Use and Avoid*. Drawings by the author.



Simplified rooflines focus the budget at street level, where they add to the experience of living in a home.



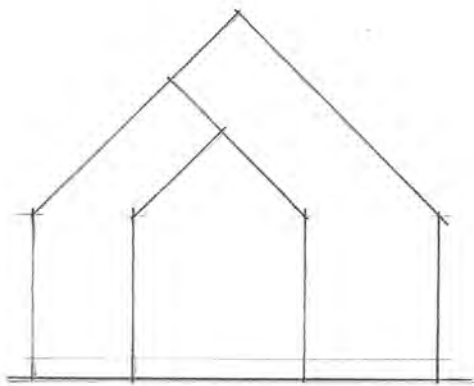
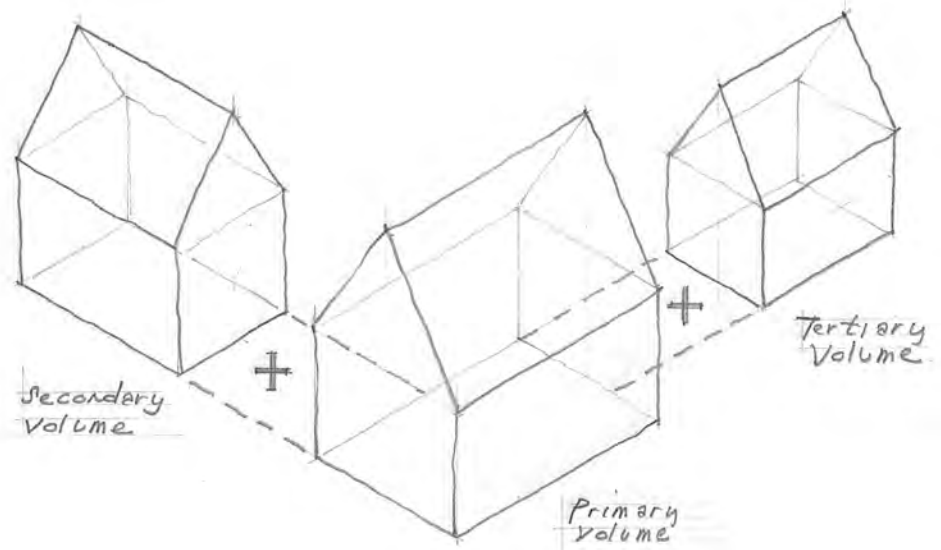
Complex McMansion rooflines waste budget in areas that can only be viewed, and never actually experienced.





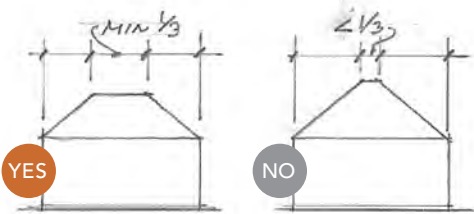
Design with additive volumes

When designing a roofline, first set a primary volume. Then grow the house with secondary and tertiary additive volumes that resolve into the primary volumes. These can grow symmetrically or asymmetrically.



Use a maximum of three gables facing the street

While there are always exceptions to any rule, a good starting point is to avoid having more than three forward-facing gables on a home, including dormers.

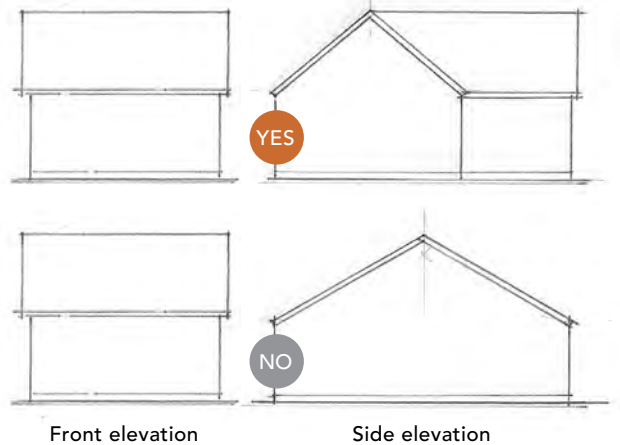


Avoid mini ridges

When using a hip roof, make the ridge one-third (at minimum) of the overall length of the home, which may mean making the house narrower. If plan adjustments aren't possible, consider using a gable roof.

Don't cheat the side elevation

While the front elevation of a house may look just fine, a deep plan can result in a side elevation where the roofline is too long and the slope too shallow. In this situation, break the roofline and add a secondary roof perpendicular to the front.



Connect roof volumes at 45°

Set the additive volumes less than or equal to the width of the primary volume, making sure the angles of roof connections are always 45°. When elevating the house, draw the side elevation early, and 3D-model the design if possible. This will reveal if you have designed volumes that do not work together. If you can't easily draw your roof and have it align in plan, section, and elevation, it will be difficult to build.

