

Sensible Soaring Ceilings

Cabin plans with really high ceilings are very popular, mainly because a structure with elevated ceilings is exciting to see and fun to live in. There's no denying the fact that towering ceilings create drama in a cabin design! If high ceilings are important to you, you should definitely include this feature in your cabin plan. However, if done without careful thought and planning, incorporating high ceilings into your cabin design can take a big bite out of your cabin's square footage, escalate your heating costs, and cut down on view potential.

Typical chalet-style cabin with cathedral ceiling

Let's consider the ubiquitous "chalet-style" cabin design. Normally it's a simple rectangular structure with a peaked roof; the living room occupies an entire gable end of the building, has a cathedral ceiling, and sports floor-to-ceiling windows on the gable-end wall, which is oriented toward the most-attractive view from the cabin's site.



This kind of cabin design is certainly dramatic, and it affords the open and spacious ambience desired by many cabin owners. For a number of reasons, though, it's not the best kind of cabin design for all situations.

Views!

Here's one reason you might not want to have a cabin like the one described above. If your cabin is a simple rectangular structure (a design without any wings or ell), and if you'll be orienting one gable end of the cabin toward your favorite view, and if your high-ceilinged living room occupies that entire end of the cabin, none of the other rooms in your cabin can take advantage of that prized view. That's because there can't be any other rooms on that end of the cabin, as the living room occupies all the downstairs floor space, and you won't have rooms above the living room because the living room's ceiling stretches all the way up to the roof.

Square footage

Typically, the living room is the largest room in a cabin. As discussed above, if your cabin's living room has a cathedral ceiling, it won't be possible to have rooms upstairs in the area over the top of the living room (unless your cabin is designed in a very unusual way). The large cathedral-ceiling area forces you

to give up a lot of space that could have been used for upstairs living area, so you might find it difficult to fit in all the upstairs rooms you'd like to have.

Comfort and energy conservation

If your cabin is to be built in a cold climate, it probably isn't a particularly good idea to put a high ceiling in a really large living space. You'll be fighting Mother Nature to maintain a comfortable temperature in that space in cold weather, because the laws of physics dictate that hot air rises – so the heated air will tend to float above the floor area where you'll be curled up on your sofa, under a blanket, because you'll feel chilled.

Given all this, what is the best way to satisfy your craving for soaring spaces and commanding views without being impractical?

Key concept: High ceiling in a small space

There's no law that says your cabin's living room has to be the area with the high ceiling. If you love the look and feel of an elevated ceiling yet you want to take a sensible and practical approach to designing your cabin, try to come up with a cabin plan that has a tall ceiling in one high-profile, often-used area that is relatively small. Here are a few suggestions.

Cavernous kitchen

Consider a cabin plan with a cathedral ceiling or vaulted ceiling in the kitchen and flat, standard-height ceilings in the other downstairs rooms. This should quench your thirst for drama without sacrificing a huge amount of upstairs square footage.

For even more architectural interest, plan your design so you'll have a balcony that overlooks the kitchen. Imagine wandering out of your upstairs bedroom in the morning and leaning over the balcony, keeping your spouse company while he or she brews up some coffee in the kitchen below.



Dramatic dining

The dining area is another place where you might want to have high ceilings. You'll spend a lot of time there, so you'll be able to enjoy the elevated ceilings multiple times throughout the day. Balance it out with normal-height, flat ceilings in the other downstairs rooms.

Open and airy office

Will you spend a lot of time at work in an office at your cabin? If so, think about putting high ceilings in the office so you can enjoy the ambience while you work.

Loft under a large dormer or gable

An upstairs loft under a large dormer or gable can be stunning and functional. If you use the loft as your TV area or reading area, you'll enjoy many hours there. Be sure to include windows that are big enough to allow for a nice view to the outside. You might find that having this one dramatic-looking area in the cabin is enough to satiate your craving for tall ceilings. In this case, you could have a cabin plan with flat, standard-height ceilings in all the downstairs rooms, thereby maximizing your upstairs square footage.



Living room on one half of gable end

Think about a high-ceilinged living room that occupies only one side of the gable end of the cabin. You can orient that end of the structure toward your favorite view, and you can put tall windows at the gable end of the room. The great thing about this kind of cabin plan is that the living room will have a wonderful vaulted ceiling, so you'll have the open and airy feeling you covet – yet that end of your cabin will have other rooms, too, both downstairs and upstairs, and you'll be able to enjoy your favorite view from those rooms in addition to enjoying it from your living room.

A caveat is in order here, though: depending upon the dimensions of your cabin's footprint, a living room that's designed this way might be somewhat narrow. Before committing to a plan like this, make sure you'll be able to arrange your living-room furniture in a way that's functional and attractive.

Solarium area on south side of cabin

If your cabin has a view to the south that is at all attractive, it's a great idea to design the south side of the cabin with high ceilings and lots of windows. Perhaps this area can be your kitchen, dining area, or both. The passive-solar heating will allow this part of the cabin to function like a solarium, which will help to heat the entire structure.

Devise the best cabin plan for your site and lifestyle

When planning your cabin design, don't necessarily go with one of the "off-the-shelf" designs provided by your builder. Instead, think about some of the ideas in this article, and take the time to come up with a design that's optimized for your cabin's location and for the way you plan to use the cabin. In the end, the extra effort will pay off!