

# Product Review: Home Designer Suite 8.0

By Jeff Gedgaud, published July 15, 2008

Better Homes and Gardens Home Designer Suite just keeps getting better with new added content but the same easy to use home design and remodeling software that is great.

Ease of Use, Performance: 22/25, Look & Feel: 23/25,  
Features 25/25, How much I enjoy 25/25  
Total: 95/100

I thought they would not be able to improve much on the Home Designer Suite but I was wrong, they not only added the libraries of useful new content that you would otherwise have to download but added useful features as well.

Being able to import Google and other third party content has to be the best feature they added but others are the new groups of objects for easy building and the new automated building and design tools of the Home Design Wizard. The core home designer is basically the same so you get the great functioning and fully featured home design software and all the general usefulness of the suite of products but the new additions are great as well.

The new libraries make it easy to have the additional content that you would have had to download from the site, they still have some things that you can also download that came out after this version though. They have also added some great groups of furniture and fixtures for already finished rooms or sections as well as the architectural blocks like kitchen islands.

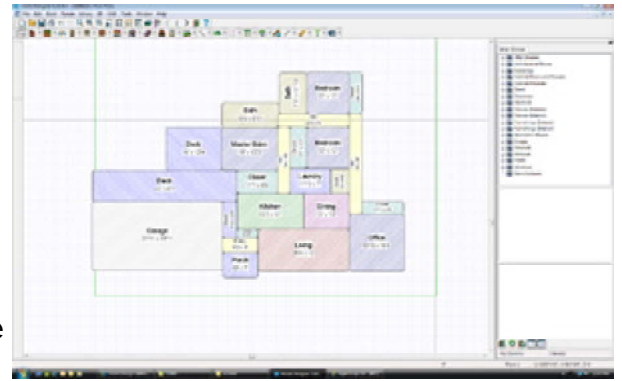
The new additions like the 3D design and editing tools that allow you to work in 2d or 3D are great for the most part but some things just naturally work better in 2D and the top down view than others. When designing walls and other larger objects it really is a bit better to work in the top down 2 dimensional mode to give you a more accurate positioning of these larger things.

When you're working with some things like decks and landscaping using the 3 dimensional view works better for these odd shaped objects. In landscaping it really helps to have the 3D view to be able to position and see what you're doing and how things look instead of continuously switching from one view to the other.

The same goes for deck design and placing parts of the deck so you have a better idea of what things look like while you're working with them. Working in either 2D or 3D gives you the choice to work how you can with the sections or areas and this option just gives you more choices with your design and remodeling on the computer.

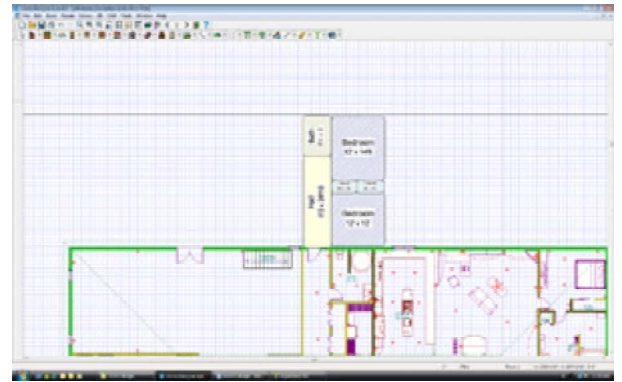
The really great additions in this version are the Automated Design Wizard that starts out as blocks you get from a wizard and you can position the blocks as you see fit to design the entire house. In the beginning of the wizard they have questions you answer and fill in how many bedrooms, halls and other rooms you want on a floor of the house and you get the blocks of each room to move around and design the house from there.

This allows for a simple building block design so you can move and reposition things how you see fit without positioning individual walls. Once you have things the way you want a good idea is to save before building the walls and if you don't like how it looks after the walls and roof are up you can change things around a bit and try again. Simply click on the Build House button of the House Wizard section in the Tools drop down menu and the program will draw in walls and door according to the block design you started with.



The House Wizard is a great and quick way to design a house with the rooms and floor plan you want as long as there are no restrictions on how you design the building. This is a great tool if you are designing an entire home or just fooling around with a remodeling project and want to add on several rooms. Being able to move things around so quickly and easily gives you a better idea of what you can do and make things as far as planning much simpler.

For a remodeling project you can start with a simple floor plan of the existing house and add on or try out various designs to see which ones you would like. You can even use the new House Wizard on existing floor plans to try out various room arrangements without messing with walls and doors, just start out with a floor plan and use the House Wizard in the tools drop down menu to add rooms and then move them around how you want. This adds a very flexible tool for remodeling designs and allows you to try out new configurations with specific rooms quickly and easily.



The Better Homes and Gardens Home Designer Suite also includes a new import function that allows you to import 3D objects from sites like Google 3D Warehouse in certain formats directly into your home design. These importable objects are obj, skp and 3ds formats that are popular with not only SketchUp for Google 3D Warehouse that people upload for others to use but programs like 3D Studio Max.

People have been creating and uploading 3D objects for others to use in programs just like Home Designer so you get the added benefit of others hard work to allow you to import and use their objects in your designs. There are a whole host of objects from cars and furniture to paint and other materials, many companies like Sherwin Williams have color palettes uploaded.

Other than these new features the same great features of the previous version are here like quick and easy wall and roof designing. The simple and easy to use library that continues to grow is also here for you to quickly choose furnishings, fixtures, materials and colors of objects.

Building with the Home Designer is simple whether you use the new and much faster wizard or just work building walls from scratch. I have used this program since receiving the first one for several projects and just plain old fooling around and having fun. My wife's daycare needs floor plans for those fire evacuation routes and using this program and the simple design tools for laying out the floor plans with walls and doors is a simple and easy way to quickly design an evacuation plan.

Adding in all the furniture, fixtures and materials is easy using the library as well as the grouped objects and the new library contents make it even easier. To give a home that lived in look quickly and show more than just simple rooms without picking out everything individually the library contains several new groups of objects like the bathroom vanity set complete with mirror, cabinets and sink or desks with a chair and books for that really lived in look.

There are complete rooms with furniture and fixtures as well as the kitchen islands and counter areas so you can quickly add in some things to get a good idea of what things will look like with furniture and other objects. For seeing what things look like you have the 2 dimensional top down view as well as the host of 3 dimensional views from the regular view you have from a camera at whatever height you desire or the dollhouse view and glass house view.

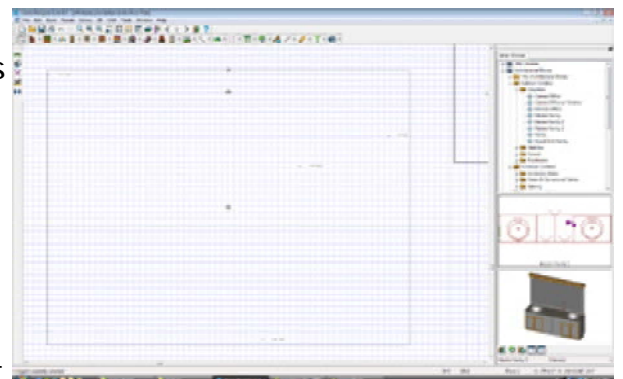
You can choose from the framing view to see the home or design before walls are completed to get an idea of the wall structure and framing. The Home Design suite comes complete with a lumber and materials estimator as well as a loan calculator to help you figure out monthly payments at certain percentage rates for a loan on the building or remodeling project. The Home Designer has a built in error checking tool that finds errors and helps you correct them like windows to close to a corner or outlets interfering with fixtures.

The program comes complete with built in building design and construction techniques and will design detail drawings like roof truss construction so the builder knows the exact details for constructing the house. These types of detail drawings are required to get building permits and the program has added them as a way to help you the home owner design and draw your own blueprints that may be used for permits.

This will of course depend on your city and county codes as well as the construction company or individuals that will be doing the work and you may have to get other drawings created. But this does help you with a great way to see exactly what you want and be able to show a drafter or architect the specifics of your home design.

The Home Designer Suite 8.0 also comes with the complete deck, landscaping and terrain building features so you take existing terrain features and create them into your design for accurate designing. You can take actual GPS readings and import them into the program for the program to give you an actual terrain following the GPS readings.

This works very well and is simple to do using a handheld GPS unit such as Magellan or Garmin sells that uses GPX formats for points. You can take a few measurements with a handheld GPS unit or several for even more accurate terrain features like hills and slopes and download them to



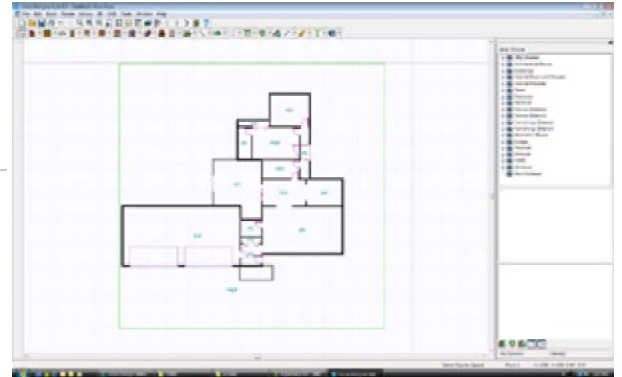
the Home Designer program. This will give you accurate lot measurements for the lot your home design will be on as well as elevation readings for your terrain.

Other features for the Home Designer program include over 3,700 plants for landscaping, create and save a virtual video tour, current materials, paint and coverings from popular manufacturers including Sherwin Williams, Marvin, Benjamin Moore and Mohawk.

The Home Designer Suite from Better Homes and Gardens and Chief Architect is a great home design program with plenty of features and works very well for designing your own home or creating floor plans for remodeling projects. The Home Designer Suite version 8.0 is the newest in the home design line of home design software and one that I highly recommend to get the most from your remodeling or home building project.

More resources

[HomeDesignerSoftware.com](http://HomeDesignerSoftware.com)



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