

No place like home for aging peacefully

■ **Designer Sonny Nazemian discusses retrofit strategies that help seniors stay in their own homes**

By JOHN BYRD
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“Aging-in-place solutions are rapidly becoming one of the high-demand sectors of the remodeling industry,” Nazemian says. “But a contractor’s knowledge and training are critical to achieving a working solution. This is a specialty area which requires staying on top of always evolving ADA (American with Disabilities Act) regulations, and strict building codes.

Nazemian, a Universal Design Certified Professional (UDCP), sees today’s homeowners exploring a wide range of options as they grapple with future mobility issues.

“The search for ways to convert a two-level house into a place with a single-level primary living plan is something we’re seeing more often,” Nazemian observes. “More frequently, we find homeowners in their fifties or sixties looking to introduce a wheel-chair friendly floorplan into the bathroom or kitchen. It’s all part of cultural shift, in which more seniors are deciding to stay put rather than move to a retirement home.

Two recent examples illustrate:

One level master suite addition helps seniors stay-put

“This house had not been de-

signed for people with looming mobility challenges,” says Fred Saalfeld, speaking of the 2,800 square foot 4 bedroom colonial in Springfield he shared for 50 years with his wife, Liz. After Liz had an unexpected stroke, the couple’s future relationship with the house came into question.

“It was beginning to look like we would have to consider moving,” Saalfeld says. “Before taking that step, though, I wanted some ideas on how we might re-design parts of the house to better suit our foreseeable needs.”

As Sonny Nazemian sees it, the art of creating a comfortable environment for homeowners with Aging-in-Place (A-I-P) requirements consists largely of mastering design ideas that will help to normalize a special needs situation.

“That’s one of the reasons that we proposed a universal design solution for Fred and Liz,” Nazemian says. “They anticipated the need for rooms large enough to maneuver in a wheel-chair, but they also wanted an aesthetically-- and functionally-- improved living space.”

From the outset, Nazemian envisioned an addition extending directly from the rear elevation into the backyard. The couple would have much larger sleeping quarters and each spouse would have their own walk-in closet.

The master bathroom suite would be “wheelchair-friendly” with a bench in the shower, grab-bars and hand-held body spray nozzles. It was also decided to allocate space for a first-level laundry. Liz would no longer have to trudge to the basement and back with a basket full of clothes.

At 1,200 square feet, the new addition would feature a 14 foot cathedral ceiling, lots of natural light and double French doors that segue to a flagstone patio.



PHOTO BY GREG HADLEY

The Saalfelds added a wheel-chair friendly master suite to the four bedrooms colonial in Springfield they had occupied for over 50 years. The 1,200 square foot addition extends directly from the old rear elevation into a formerly hilly backyard. The flagstone patio immediately outside the master bedroom is linked to a network of walkways that segues to a gazebo, an herb garden and an exercise area for the family Irish setter. Owner Fred Saalfeld, who walks the aid of two canes, says the remodeling changes have created a major quality of life improvement that has made it much easier to enjoy the home.

The rub: a backyard that rises at a 20-degree angle from the home’s rear door. To form the 28-by-42 footprint needed, the design team would excavate three feet from the existing surface, remove six metric tons of earth, and--to secure necessary soil compaction-- plant several trees and a grove of Tocks shrubbery.

To control water run-off, the remodeler introduced a French drain and swell linked to an infiltration trench.

With the foundation in place, attention turned to the new addition’s space plan and design. Exterior brick cladding was expertly matched to the home’s original masonry, creating a seamless enlargement of the existing house. Interior floors were, likewise, milled and finished to flawlessly blend with the hardwood floors in the existing structure.

To insure natural light and comfort, Nazemian specified

low-E, double Argon-filled glass for all windows, including a pair of double French doors that lead to the patio. A smaller, louvered door was created for the family’s Irish setter, who exercises in a side yard.

A new split-system HVAC unit was installed to provide the new addition with dedicated heat and air control. The solution proved to be a significant money-saver, since it concentrates temperature requirements in rooms where the couple spends most of their time.

Moreover, at 200 square feet, the master bathroom is a masterpiece of efficiency and warmth. The door from the bedroom is 32 inches wide with a 90 degree swing radius as required by the ADA regulations, yet the interior design is soft and earthy, with porcelain tiling offset by walnut cabinet facings and a granite-topped vanity.

To meet new storage needs, the design team closed-in the garages and added new closets and cubbies.

Best yet, a series of well-defined walkways link garden focal points with a mid-yard gazebo. Surrounded by a privacy fence, the grounds are a nicely protected Eden, perfect for quiet enjoyment.

Bathroom meets A-I-P requirements

“We mainly wanted interior design and personal-use improvements,” Marguerite Ragone, from Reston, recalls: “but we were also keen on finding an Aging-in-Place solution that would allow us to comfortably continue living in our house. Among these, we pictured a roll-in shower that wouldn’t require a built-in curb to keep the water in--but weren’t sure what was possible.”

To meet the new shower requirements, the Micheal Nash team removed the platform tub and introduced a subfloor that raised the floor about an inch.

The shower is now lower than before, and the subfloor bevels slightly toward a linear drain, so there’s no need for a built-in lip around the shower.”

“This kind of change requires angles that are absolutely precise,” Nazemian says. “Water is always the judge of whether a shower design works well.”

Tucked behind two 3-foot glass walls, the new 5 feet by 5 feet open shower occupies a corner opposite the entrance from the bedroom. There’s a small bench at one end, with the hand-held shower nozzle within easy reach. Overhead, the stainless steel “waterfalls” rain shower head features a range of water pressure options and sprays.

To improve access, the hallway leading into the suite has

been widened from 32 inches to 36 inches (ADA wheel-chair clearance requirements). The doorless shower is, likewise, ADA compliant.

For a more leisurely bathing experience, however, the classic claw-foot tub – positioned catty-corner below two windows – presents a restful view of the treetops.

The tub is also zoned for maximum privacy. It is steps from the vanity and towels and away from traffic to the shower and commode.

To accommodate the couple’s personal needs, the design team replaced a single sink vanity with a double vanity, flanked by wardrobe closets that occupy 10 linear feet of wall space.

Constructed of cherrywood and featuring Cambridge-style cabinet facings and exotic granite surfaces, the vanities present a clean, linear elegance in a room that is now refreshingly simplified and spacious.

“All of our interior work, including plumbing and electrical, is executed by our employees,” says Sonny Nazemian. “This gave us [the] ability to deliver more for the money. Also, we don’t charge for unknown contingencies, and avoid changing orders.”

All in all: a very pretty, very restful personal space.

“This is really a kind of sanctuary now,” Marguerite says. “We look forward to our years ahead in this house with much greater confidence.”

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