

HOMES

The new frontier: Townhouse renovation – part two

■ Practices for more spacious, attractive and comfortable townhouses

By JOHN BYRD
SPECIAL TO THE FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

Last week, Fairfax County Times featured one of three recent award-winning townhouse renovation projects: a retired Alexandria couple looking for a way to make better use of a grilling deck on their home's side elevation. This week, part two will feature the expansion of the middle of a three-level Merrifield townhouse.

Increasing the living space in a townhouse requires a demanding set of skills.

"There are usually structural and building code issues involved," says remodeler Sonny Nazemian. "We often discover that the original builder did not optimize the space plan in the build-out, so there's a lot of wasted square footage that can be put to better use."

Nazemian should know, as founder and CEO of Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes, the remodeler has renovated hundreds of townhomes, frequently winning top peer awards from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, the National Association of Home Builders and Qualified Remodeler Magazine among—other purveyors of highest quality work.

That being said, the investment incentive for renovating a local townhouse has been steadily improving. In the past 12 months, real estate assessments for townhomes in northern Virginia have increased at a faster annual rate (3.15 percent) than single family homes (2.36 percent) -- and with new metro stations driving demand, resale values are growing. Add to this homeowner passion for both long-term occupancy and distinctive interior design and it's clear that there's a "sea-change" in attitudes about townhomes.

"Expectations for townhomes have evolved," Nazemian observes. "As a company, we've been instrumental in introducing expanded plans with enhanced storage capacity, cleaner sightlines and designs that truly satisfy personal, functional and aesthetic considerations. Townhouse renovation has become one of the real frontiers in northern Virginia's very dynamic housing market."

Mosaic District Open plan features transitional-style

For Christina Gee and Ryan Watkins, who have occupied their townhome in Merrifield's Mosaic District for 17 years, the search for improvements began with re-assessing priorities.

"The house is sized appropriately for our needs," Watkins says. "And the easy metro commute made our decision to remodel a sensible one. We wanted functional improvements, but also comfortable in-kitchen dining."

The couple researched ideas online-- always keeping an eye-out for the building professional who got their vision.

"Ironically, the Michael Nash showroom is only a few miles away," Christina Gee says. "I had been perusing Houzz, but Michael Nash offers a significant display of finishwork ideas, and staff designers with relevant insights. Also, we were very attracted to the fixed price policy."

Looking closely at how the primary second level activity zones were built-out, the Michael Nash team identified a lot of mis-allocated space and expansion opportunities, for instance:

- The small part of the kitchen, which is designated as a family room, utilized square footage that might more sensibly be applied to a larger kitchen-centric floorplan, where everyone could get involved in cooking.

- The wall, separating the kitchen from the dining room and living room, blocked the flow of natural light from the east-facing rear of the house to the living room, which made both rooms feel smaller.

- Ceiling-flush bulk heading in the kitchen wasn't necessary, and it restricted cabinet height.

- The lack of front-to-back visual continuum on the second level made the room seem smaller.

To expand available square footage, the middle of a three level townhouse, designers deleted a bearing wall between the kitchen and a formal dining area, insinuating an I-beam that is supported by concealed vertical shafts.

The "opening" gave way to a counter surface and three-seat dining counter. The change also augments natural light and visual continuum from front to back.

To gain kitchen floorspace, the team removed a pantry and oven stack, and relocated the refrigerator to the newly surfaced south wall.

On a similar note, deleting unnecessary bulkheading allowed



PHOTO BY GREG HADLEY

To introduce an "open" plan into the middle of a three level townhouse, designers deleted a bearing wall between the kitchen and a formal dining area, insinuating an I-beam mounted on concealed vertical shafts to bear the weight of upper floors. The project was named a "Contractor of the Year" (COTY) winner by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.



BEFORE: The small part of the kitchen designated as a family room utilized square footage that might be more sensibly applied to a larger kitchen-centric plan.

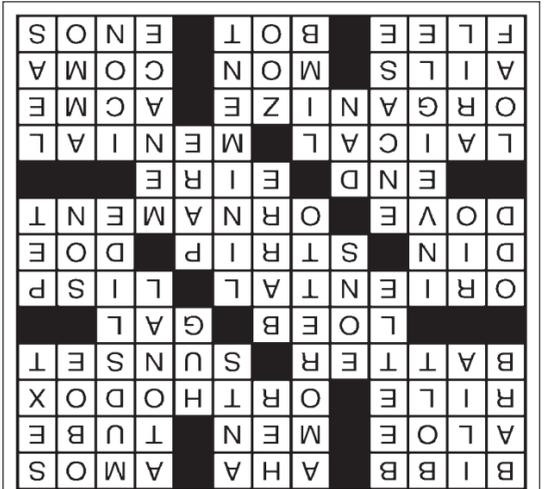
for taller cabinets and custom cubbies. Roll-out shelving proved a handy space saver.

Today, there are custom cubbies for favorite pots, dishes and glassware, a special drawer for fruits and vegetables, a drawer for exotic teas. At the stove, an under cabinet pull-down shelf with a light is a perfect place to mount a cookbook needed when preparing a meal. The built-in efficiencies make the room feel larger. Because of the two counter-height surfaces, the whole family can participate in kitchen duties at the same time.

For information, call: 703-641-9800 or visit: www.MichaelNashKitchens.com

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