

Tear this wall down

Barrier-free design helps couple age in place

BY JOHN BYRD
SPECIAL TO THE FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

An innovative addition and floor plan reconfiguration to a circa 1940s Cape Cod-style home has won a "Contractor of the Year" Grand award (COTY) for Glickman Design Build. The design solution-- in which a 200 square foot added to the home's rear elevation is integrated into an open floor plan that accommodates aging-in-place considerations-- was introduced into the home of Katharine Alter and Foster Lott who have occupied it for 16 years. The project was named the metro area's best "Entire House Universal Design" by the Washington, DC chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

In accepting the prize, Glickman Design Build president and founder Russ Glickman praised his company's high-performance team, which grappled with several structural, site and interior design challenges.

"We've been actively implementing Aging-in-Place (AIP) retrofit designs for over 20 years," Glickman said. "The technical and regulatory requirements have firmly established this as a specialty remodeling arena, which is why we have steadfastly acquired the whole range of professional certifications. That being said, it's fascinating that AIP interior design standards have risen proportionately as homeowners insist on aesthetically-pleasing solutions that show well and advance owner lifestyle requirements."

Alter and Foster, both in their sixties, were seeking revisions that would allow them to stay in the house in the event of mobility challenges. Foster, who is retired, had been effected by orthopedic issues that had gradually made it difficult to reach second floor bedrooms. Alter, a physician who specializes in rehabilitation medicine, was also aware of the technical challenges entailed retrofitting and upgrading a 70-year-old house.

"I've seen older people struggling to make emergency adjustments demanded by sudden mobility problems, and know how crucial it is to plan ahead," she recalls. "In addition to everything else, a steep drop in the front of our house prohibited the typical wheelchair access options," she notes.

The Glickman plan called



PHOTOS BY FELICIA EVANS

Metro DC's Best "Entire House Universal Design" Solution. An addition to a circa 1940's Cape Cod-style home supplemented by an innovative floor plan reconfiguration has won a "Contractor of the Year" Grand award (COTY) for Glickman Design Build. The Aging-In-Place retrofit was introduced into the home of Katharine Alter and Foster Lott, who have occupied for over 16 years.

for: relocating the master suite to the first floor; adding a spacious curbless shower to an adjacent master bath, developing wheelchair-access from the driveway to a new family room on rear of the house, and completely redesigning the first-level interior. Front and rear elevations would also acquire more contemporary architectural accents.

"We wanted our house to support us as we get older," Katharine says. "But we also desired a more contemporary interior design, iterated in a style suited to an open floorplan."

Not coincidentally, Alter had known Glickman for 25 years--having worked with his son, Mike, who was born with Cerebral Palsy.

"Russ is well-established as the community's 'go-to' guy for addressing mobility issues of any kind. I don't know of anyone else who offers his breadth of experience," she says.

From the outset, Glickman's plan had two components: 1) create a family room on the western side of the house that steps back 12 feet from the existing rear elevation; 2) eliminate first-level interior walls on both sides of the staircase. Also, 265 square feet on the first level would be allocated for a new master suite that would include 31 square foot walk-in shower with the 5-foot turning radius needed for wheelchair maneuverability.

Since the existing first floor offered only 1,593 square feet of

living space, remodeling changes needed to be carefully defined. Even so, Glickman's computer-modeling technologies (CADD system) revealed that the couple didn't so lack living space as a floorplan configured to serve specific needs.

Removing a bearing wall on the rear elevation would dra-

matically increase natural light availability while allowing for an interior retrofit that would facilitate a whole range of possible mobility requirements.

But how does one remove a wall that supports the entire second floor?

The plan calls for two new vertical supports, artfully con-

cealed behind main level walls, to do the heavy lifting. With supports in place, a horizontal beam was installed atop of the posts, under-girding the second floor and opening up unimpeded front-to-back sight lines.

"When the goal is to improve the space plan while staying inside the envelop of the home, properly re-allocating a few square feet can greatly improve overall effectiveness," Glickman observes. "In this case, it made sense to design custom built-ins to support a whole range of everyday tasks."

The deeper satisfaction for the owners, though, is the beautifully articulated "open plan" with its many well-defined, cleverly-integrated activity zones, to wit:

A 300 square foot family room with a 12-foot cathedral ceiling on the rear of the house provides a wheelchair accessible door from the rear of the house via the driveway. The addition faces northwest and tends to stay cool in hot weather. Because the house is squarely in the middle of two ¼ acre lots, a back yard is brimming with mature trees assure privacy and bird watching

By eliminating interior walls on both sides of the central staircase, the Glickman team introduces a 154 square foot kitchen footprint that makes adroit use of cutting edge appliances, surfaces and finish work. The "transitional-style" interior design balances contemporary interior elevations with owner-selected mid-century modern furnishings to create a warmly personal look

The first floor master bedroom occupies a footprint formerly occupied by the old kitchen and a small bath. A dual-access master bath is positioned at an angle between the revised living room and master bedroom

For Information: Virginia 703-832-8158; Maryland 301-444-4663; DC 202-792-7320 or Glickmandesignbuild.com

John Byrd has been writing about home improvement for 30 years. He can be reached @ 703-715-8006, www.HomeFrontsNews.com or byrdmatx@gmail.com. Send photos of interesting remodeling projects to: b2b@homefrontsnews.com.



The 31 square foot shower incorporates the five foot turning radius needed for unfettered wheel-chair maneuverability.



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Kitchen floors and function

CONTENT BY
KIM & JAVEN HOUSE
SPECIAL TO THE
FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES



Whether designing a brand new kitchen or renovating your existing one, there are many elements to consider, and the floor should not be the last. Giving special attention to the material composition of your kitchen, particularly when it comes to the aspects that take the heaviest use - the floors, sink and countertops - can help ensure your renovation stands the test of time.

Though often taken for granted, the floor is generally the kitchen feature that sustains the heaviest use over time. Whether your tastes tend toward tile, wood or another option altogether, there are still numerous variables to explore.

Tile is an excellent choice for the kitchen because it stands up well to the heavy traffic and spills common in that space. However, tile can also be slippery and can be uncomfortable if you spend long amounts of time on your feet in the kitchen. Ceramic tile is the easiest to in-

stall but not as resistant to damage as porcelain or stone tile.

The latter options require more skilled installation, and stone especially tends to be more expensive. You'll also need to pay attention to factors like water resistance and texture, both of which affect safety and how easily the floors can be cleaned.

When it comes to wood, one of the first decisions is whether you prefer engineered or solid hardwood.

Engineered versions tend to offer greater durability and flexibility in installation while the texture and appearance of solid hardwood are its strongest appeals. Other variables include the wood type, which further affects the look and strength. Oak is most common, but other traditional selections include options like maple or cherry and specialty woods like teak



Kim & Javen
703-201-8660
Kim.house@Lnf.com
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or bamboo. Plank width influences overall aesthetic, with slimmer boards lending a more modern look. Color is also a consideration, as you'll need to determine whether you want to match, complement or contrast your cabinetry.

If something a little less traditional is more your speed, an option like foot-friendly cork or a modern take on vinyl may be more to your liking.

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