

Senior Living

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McLean
CONNECTION

Senior Living

Taking the Long View

BY JOHN BYRD
THE CONNECTION

Budgeted, incremental improvements are the key to effective planning, aging in place.

When they decided not to move-on after retirement, seniors Mike and Sandy Nusbaum slowly began enlarging their long-term residence with several goals in mind.

Ten years and four improvements later, the couple's Alexandria home is ideal for extended visits with children and grandchildren—and all sorts of everyday pleasures.

Home improvements can come in many sizes: life-changing or simply necessary; comprehensive, or something to please the grandkids.

The real problem is practical: how to conveniently and affordably implement a list of desired improvements—especially when experience tells you that securing a satisfactory outcome for even a basic household repair can be challenging.

In this context, it's heartening to talk with Mike and Sandy Nusbaum, retired empty-nesters who have executed mid- to large-scale renovations to their thirty-year-old south Alexandria residence in phases, about once every two years and for more than a decade.

Plainly, the Nusbaums like their house, a circa-1980s Colonial-style home where they raised three children. While somewhat space-constrained at its original 2,100 square feet, the structure's location adjacent to woodland and minutes from historic Old Town made it hard to beat.

As retirement neared, however, the couple began cautiously reassessing their home's basic assets, even briefly considering a move to a bigger place.

"You have to ask yourself whether the next house will actually improve your quality of life," Sandy Nusbaum says, recounting her thoughts of twelve years back. "When we looked at the alternatives ... we realized there were only a few things about our house that we didn't like."

AND SO IT BEGAN. Plans for incremental changes. Kitchen and screened porch.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOME FRONTS NEWS

Mike and Sandy Nusbaum have enlarged their home four times in the past ten years. Each phase has improved the home's overall functionality, which has transformed it into a preferred gathering place for children, grandchildren and extended family.

New family room and deck. Lower level. Enlarged Garage ... Facilitated by a new relationship, with 30-year veteran remodeler David Foster, principal of Foster Remodeling Solutions.

"We met some homeowners at a local home show who raved about David," Sandy recalls. "David has a low-key style, and a strong service orientation that helps us make informed decisions."

Looking back, while the remodeler's fresh design ideas were critical, the couple also appreciated his clearly-stated, always-reliable cost projections.

"WE WERE ON THE CUSP of retirement and didn't want debt," Mike Nusbaum says. "Our first thought was to make targeted improvements to the kitchen while keeping our options open for the larger family entertainment suite we might undertake as we assessed the budget issue."

Foster was not only supportive of such thinking, but, as the Nusbaums learned, considers "phased remodeling" an integral

part of his company's service.

"I grew up in Fairfax County and have learned my business by helping homeowners find a process that will work for them as they think ahead," he says.

Once work began, the Nusbaums particularly noted the foresight Foster brought to each improvement.

"Ten years ago, we wanted the rooms extending from the kitchen to function better as a place for entertainment. We had a small dining room that wasn't being used much. The back rooms were too dark," Sandy Nusbaum recalls.

In short order, the wall between the kitchen and dining room disappeared, replaced by a three-stool Silestone counter that has become the couple's primary kitchen gathering area. That counter surface was also positioned as a serving station for the new elevated 16-by16-foot screened porch that is now a much-used fair-weather dining spot.

A new window over the kitchen sink adds natural light and a lovely view of the back-

yard. "When you walk from the kitchen to the screen porch, it feels like you're walking in the air through the trees," Sandy says. "This gave us a wonderful re-discovery of our own backyard."

From there, it wasn't long before the Nusbaums began planning an extension of the rear family room, an open-air grilling deck and a pathway that permits children, grandchildren and guests to circulate freely through a wide-ranging suite of rooms used for social gatherings.

"It was at this point that we started having holiday gatherings for up to thirty," Sandy says. "Such fun!"

WHICH LED TO THE THIRD PHASE:

Transform the 800-square-foot lower level into an exercise room that doubles as a guest suite. Here a comfortable Murphy bed folds out of a discrete closet. There's a full bath, and built-in serving station with refrigerator and microwave. The Nusbaums refer to it as "the family suite." On holidays, it can be occupied for days at a stretch.

Then, just last year, Foster created a second bay for the garage by building a wing off the side elevation. The new construction is supplemented by a garden shed accessed from the yard. The contents, pruning tools, mower, freed up floor space in the garage, which now (for the first time) has room for something special: two cars.

"What we really appreciate about David Foster is there are no bad surprises, and frequently there are good ones," Mike Nusbaum said. "Last year, for instance, he repaired a window that was out of warranty and didn't charge us. That kind of service encourages you to think ahead."

John Byrd (byrdmatx@gmail.com or www.HomeFrontsNews.com) has been writing about home improvement for 30 years.



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THE CONNECTION
NEWSPAPERS

Luxury Condos are a Growth Market for Seniors

Active retirees seek options for independent living, including condos in Alexandria, Arlington, Tysons, Reston, McLean, Bethesda and Chevy Chase, among others.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

When Joyce and Don Lipman decided to move out of their Potomac, Md. home, they opted for a high-end townhouse instead of a retirement community. They gained a cosmopolitan environment and lost the burdensome maintenance of a large home.

"My husband always hated taking care of the grounds and he didn't want to pay someone to do it, and we weren't ready for a retirement community," said Joyce Lipman, who is 71. "Now I can walk to the shopping center and to my doctor's office. I couldn't believe it the first time I was able to go without my car. It was like a new lease on life."

When another active retired couple decided to downsize and move out of their home, they opted for a high-end condominium instead of moving to a retirement community. They enjoy traveling and own a beach home where they often spend time. When it came time to design their new living space, they sought the help of Kelley Proxmire of Kelley Interior Design in Bethesda, Md.

The couple wanted "a pretty, yet practical home and also a place they could lock and leave on a moment's notice," said Proxmire.

Condominiums and townhouses are growing in popularity for midlife couples because unlike large homes, they don't require a lot of maintenance, and they offer opportunities for living independently.

"In the next three to five years, luxury condominiums are going to be extremely popular with that age group, those who feel the colonial home is too big and they don't want the ... mentality of retirement communities," said Debbie Miller, an Arlington-based associate broker with McEneaney



PHOTO CREDIT

Kelley Proxmire designed plush interior for a retired couple who downsized from a larger home into a luxury condominium.

"In the next three to five years, luxury condominiums are going to be extremely popular with ... those who feel the colonial home is too big and they want the freedom of locking and leaving their home."

— Debbie Miller, McEneaney Associates

Inc. who specializes in the 55 and over real estate market. "Luxury condominiums provide a great option."

Miller says that in addition to proximity to shopping, dining and public transportation, amenities such as a 24-hour concierge

service that can handle requests such as meal delivery and grocery shopping make high-end buildings sought after among well-heeled retirees.

The buyers Miller works with are looking for condos "that provide a 'lock-and-leave' advantage for residents who ... like to travel or who spend six months here and six months elsewhere."

Such condominiums are prized and often hard to obtain.

"There are some that are very exclusive and [others that] don't come on the market very often," she said. "I sold a unit in the Rotonda [in McLean] a year ago and had multiple offers that were all cash."

ONE REASON THAT retirees opt for condominiums over retirement communities is freedom without restrictions, such as the frequency or length of stay for overnight guests. "In a retirement community, your

grandchildren might only be able to visit for two weeks. Condos provide more of an independent feel," said Miller. "Owning a condo allows them the opportunity to pay the condo fee and come and go as they please and someone else takes care of the maintenance."

Another reason is proximity, with a condominium community more likely than a retirement community to be in an urban environment like Arlington, Reston or Tysons.

Among the most favored luxury condominium properties in Northern Virginia, says Miller, are The Palladium of McLean, Midtown at Reston, the Porto Vecchio in Old Town Alexandria, and the Turnberry Tower in Arlington.

"There are many other high-rises that appeal to the 55 and older crowd due to convenience and lots of amenities and that are walkable," she said.

Gerontology experts offer perspective for retirees who are looking to buy a new home. "The main thing is to consider safety," said Beverly Middle, DNP, RN, Assistant Professor of the College of Health and Human Services in the School of Nursing at George Mason University. "Communities where there are other older adults tend to have services in place to support them."

Middle recommends using evidence-based design when creating dwellings suitable for seniors. "It's a new science that's geared toward older adults and is very specific to their needs," she said.

Addressing retirees' desire to live a vibrant and active life that takes freedom and safety into consideration, some retirement communities are working to broaden their appeal to a wider group of seniors. For example, Sunrise Senior Living, based in McLean, created a Live With Purpose program which offers residents structured programs that include activities for volunteering and learning.

"No matter your age, each of us has interests, desires and activities that make us feel whole and help contribute to a meaningful, healthy life," said Rita Altman, senior vice president of Memory Care & Program Services for Sunrise.

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