

The Art of Aging in Place

How the Purchase of a Neighboring Row House Led to the Creation of a Perfect Place to Retire

The design to combine the two homes had to be practical—and feasible.



BY BRUCE WENTWORTH, AIA,
WITH SHERRY MOELLER

Sometimes there's no place better to retire than where you already are. Such is the case for a Wentworth, Inc. client living in southwest Washington, DC in an area known as Tiber Island, a mixture of row houses and high-rise apartments. Tiber Island was built during the an urban renewal phase in the 1960s to revitalize the southwest quadrant of Washington, DC.

No one was more familiar with the neighborhood than this homeowner, who originally rented an apartment in a Tiber Island tenant high-rise. When the development converted to a cooperative in the late 1970s, she had the opportunity to purchase a two-story plus basement row house. A midcentury modern design aficionado, this client judiciously acquired furniture and accessories that fit the 1960s modern-style row house. Eames chairs, Jensen light fixtures and primary colors were combined to produce a vintage 60 atmosphere that suited the home.

After extensive traveling, the recently retired homeowner knew she wanted to stay put in her beloved row house where she had lived for 20 years. Located near Washington Harbor with Potomac River views

and amenities within walking distance, the three-level home had more than enough space, but not in all the right places. With the bedrooms on the second level and no room to add an elevator, the homeowner saw a golden opportunity to age in place when her neighbor's row house went on the market for sale. By purchasing the home next door with its mirrored floor plan, and connecting it with hers, she was able to create a main level master suite, resulting in a one-floor living space.

Based on her experience with architects and the building process from years of participating in the Arlington County School Board construction team, the client knew a design-build approach (in which architect and builder work hand-in-hand, often as part of the same firm) best suited the project and thought of Bruce Wentworth of Wentworth, Inc., whom she had met on several occasions.

The New Design

The design to combine the two homes had to be practical—and feasible—beginning with the second staircase that had to remain where it was. The kitchen in the newly acquired row house was gutted and



redesigned as a new master bath, which also serves as a main floor powder room for guests. The former dining room was redesigned as a dressing room with closets, built-in furniture, and plumbing and electric for a future stackable washer and dryer. The former living room became the new main level master bedroom with its own gas fireplace. Now, if necessary, the homeowner can truly live on one floor.

The Construction Phase

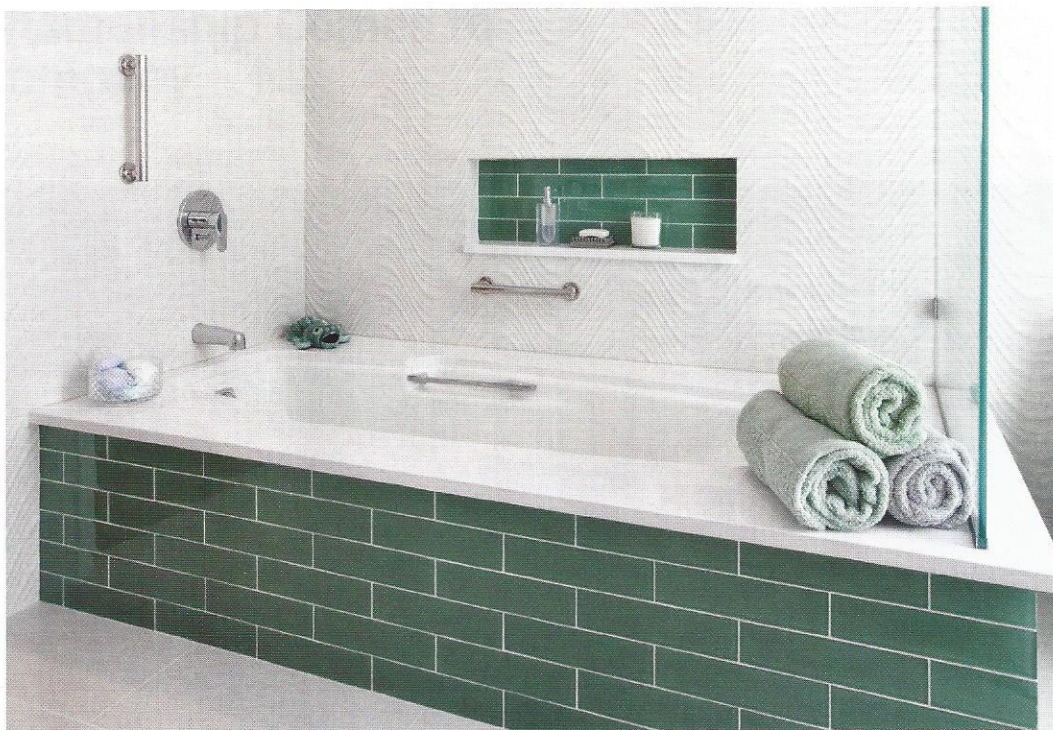
The load-bearing masonry wall between the units was opened in four locations:

1. A door was constructed at the bottom of the two sets of stairs to connect the finished and unfinished lower levels, both of which had laundry rooms.
2. At the designated first floor entry door, the foyer was expanded with a 9-foot- wide opening that linked the two spaces, provided a generous entry-way and access to the first floor master bath.
3. On the second floor, the two rear bedrooms were deemed hobby rooms and an 8-foot- wide opening was created to connect the spaces.
4. At the two front bedrooms, a connecting door was installed with a lock for privacy.

Co-op regulations prohibited exterior alterations, so all windows and doors remained and the now single home still looks like two row houses, side by side. A 3M film was added to the glass doors in the newly acquired unit to make the glass look frosted and also to provide privacy.

New First Floor Master Bathroom

Cast Iron Tub / The combined row homes include a total of six standard-size bathrooms, but none were on the first floor or ample in size. But the clients most feature was a soaking tub and not a walk-in shower in the new main level master bathroom. She wanted a large 6- foot cast iron Kohler soaking tub, which due to its weight required reinforcing the floor framing. The tub came with two built-in grab bars for ease in getting in and out. To ensure safety, two additional grab bars were installed on the walls: one was mounted vertically to hold onto when entering and leaving the tub and the other was placed horizontally on the wall.



The kitchen in the newly acquired row house was gutted and redesigned as a new master bath.

The new tub was designed to fit into a platform that allows the homeowner to sit on the edge and swing around to get in, as well as with enough counter space for soaps, sponges, candles and other accessories. A frosted glass panel creates a sense of closure at the tub base and for those occasions when the tub doubles as a shower, a custom stainless steel shower rod was fabricated to discretely connect to the glass panel.

Wall Tiles / Large format 12' x 24" white ceramic wall tiles featuring a wavy pattern, installed from floor to ceiling, were designed to convey the sense of water. Smaller scale, green glass wall tiles were selected to complement the watery theme and contrast with the white wall tile.

Custom Vanity / The custom-designed, clean-line vanity cabinet with storage was placed in a 5-foot-wide niche and suspended to allow the floor tile to continue underneath, visually expanding the space. Recessed medicine cabinets and shelving enhance the vanity storage while a manmade countertop material offers easy cleanup.

New First Floor Dressing Room

A large, well-organized dressing room is often not an option due to limited space, but this remodeling project allowed the homeowner to create what she

wanted. Located in the former dining room, the new dressing area accommodates nearly 12 linear feet of closet space as well as ample built-in dresser storage. The client installed a whimsical glass-ball chandelier in the center of the room, plus an upholstered bench for seating.

Custom Painting / Inspired by French wallpaper, the homeowner engaged a neighbor, who is an artist, to custom paint the four sliding closet doors in a silver leaf and foliage theme to create a unique setting. A full-length mirror and framed-in glass buttons finish the space.

Privacy Panels / To provide privacy when guests are visiting, the architects specified four sliding door panels with frosted glass leading into the dressing room from the entryway. The well-crafted 8-foot-tall glass panels create aesthetic impact and also glide easily when the need arises.

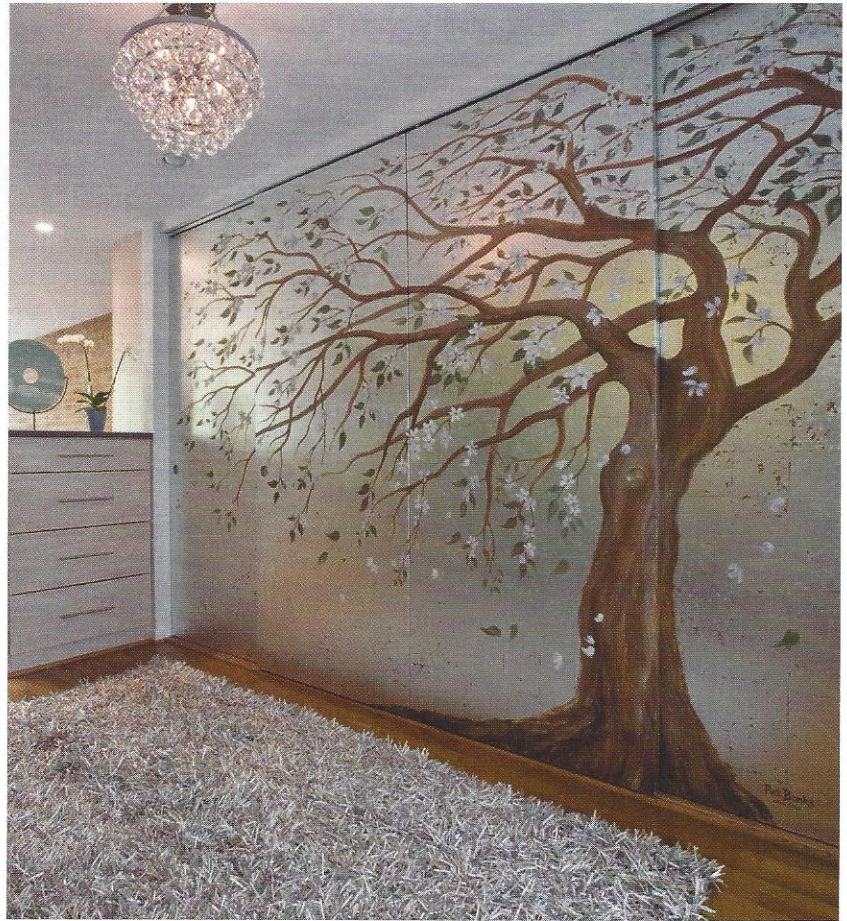
New First Floor Master Bedroom

The master bedroom features an exposed brick wall original to the 1960s row house, plus a gas fireplace that was newly fitted with a limestone surround and hearth. A custom walnut bed with matching nightstands and a midcentury modern Eames chair provide comfort and style.

Considerations for Successfully Aging in Place

- One floor living when possible and practical
- Bathrooms that emphasize safety, space and ease of use
- Bathtubs with integrated grab bars that are easy to get in and out of
- Grab bars that are unobtrusive
- Walk-in curbless shower
- Handheld shower wands
- Comfort height toilets
- Sinks with knee space
- Automatic water temperature controls
- Non-slip surfaces in the shower and on the bathroom floor
- Good lighting
- Flush thresholds between rooms to prevent tripping
- Main level laundry room
- Space saving features and adequate storage throughout including in the entryway

This project is an excellent example of how an experienced and inventive design-build firm can collaborate with a practical yet imaginative client to expand and modify a home that meets the client's current and future desires and needs. The result is a beautiful yet highly functional home that is suited



for one or more people in their younger years and for those who are planning to age gracefully, comfortably and safely. ■

Bruce Wentworth, AIA, is president of Wentworth, Inc., a residential remodeling design-build firm in Chevy Chase, Maryland, www.wentworthstudio.com. He can be reached at 240.395.0705 x 100.

What you want, when YOU want it

We realize that stocking what you need at a competitive price isn't always enough. Dominion Electric offers **competitive pricing** coupled with **high-end service**, customized to each of our clients. Let our qualified consultants work with you to **develop designs and layouts** for your remodeling plans.

Proudly stocking:



Lighting Showrooms

ARLINGTON 703-536-4400 CHANTILLY 703-631-8300 LAUREL 301-470-2121

DOMINION
ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY, INC.

visit us online at www.dominionelectric.com

You can also follow us on Facebook



Our skilled consultants are knowledgeable and experienced to ensure you have what you want, when you want it.