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BOWA kitchen renovation in Arlington features under-counter microwave and beverage center.



BOWA basement renovation includes space for arts & crafts, games and media.

Remodeling in 2015: All about Family

Adapting your home so it tracks your family's development over the years.

BY JOSHUA BAKER
BOWA

Almost every luxury remodel starts with the same question "How can we improve our family's life at home?" But this answer varies as our families grow, age and evolve. And the best designs consider both current and future needs.

For young families, the focus is almost always child-centric. Kitchens are designed with low drawers for easy access to the most important items, like sippy cups and napkins. Refrigerator drawers installed as beverage stations and below-the-counter microwaves allow the "vertically challenged" to help themselves. Study areas are incorporated into family spaces to allow for parent-child interaction at homework time.

Creative storage solutions and child-friendly finishes, like washable wall paint, chalkboard paint in play areas, and custom ceramic tiles featuring kids' artwork in their bath, all lend to a successful design.

In the teen years, the question asked most often is, "How do I create the house where all the kids and their friends want to hang out?" For this age group, creative basement remodels with game areas are most popular, and perhaps not surprisingly, basement bars are often minimized or omitted completely. As opposed to the closed-off theaters of the past, media viewing rooms are now open and designed as multi-purpose spaces that also facilitate informal gatherings and entertaining. For the ambitious, outdoor features, such as pools, patios and fire pits, can create a neighborhood destination. (Though pools and water features are of-

ten delayed until kids are old enough to be safe around water.)

Teen-friendly designs often include a family foyer, an entrance from the garage with plenty of storage for sports equipment, coats, backpacks, etc. Other potential opportunities for teens include creating small, fun spaces like lofts in bedrooms, themed bedrooms, and making sure that there are plenty of USB charging stations.

For empty nesters, remodeling typically involves "downsizing" within the home by planning to use the space more efficiently. Often, one-level living is designed for convenience and to reduce energy use. Heating and cooling systems are zoned so only the inhabited areas are fully conditioned when in use. Apartment-style washer and dryers are right sized for a couple. Smaller, drawer-style dishwashers are also available. And, perhaps now is the time to discuss repurposing spaces that were previously used as game rooms or homework stations into areas to accommodate hobbies and interests.

Almost all design discussions should at least contemplate the potential for boomerang kids (children coming home after college), in-laws, or elderly family members who might join the home. For those wanting more independence and privacy, in-law suites sometimes include private entrances and even a small kitchenette. Sometimes kids' rooms are moved to the basement to add more privacy.

For all of us as we get older, a house that incorporates the principles of universal design, which allow us to live comfortably and safely in the homes we love, is a critical conversation. Design considerations include creating accessibility-friendly baths, kitchens, entrances and passageways and

perhaps reconfiguring to minimize steps. Often, a strategy that comes up is the consideration of the installation of an elevator to facilitate long-time use.

The design priorities for each remodel are unique to the family, but thinking about all the different phases of family life is critical to long-term success.

Josh Baker is the founder and co-chairman of BOWA, an award-winning design and construction company specializing in luxury renovations, remodels and additions in the greater Washington, D.C. area. BOWA has more than 25 years of experience and has been honored with 170 local and national awards. Visit www.bowa.com or call 703-734-9050.



Renovated home office by BOWA features space for the whole family.



Custom designed cabinetry in this renovated family foyer in Great Falls keeps a busy family organized.

Condo Living Ideal for Recent Retirees

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOMEFRONTSNEWS

A pair of luxury baths add comfort and charm to 30-year old unit.

BY JOHN BYRD

One of the challenges of modern retirement is creating a space that will serve for the long term; another is stretching the budget.

Approaching retirement, Kathleen David explored both of these considerations recently with husband when they decided to sell their multi-level townhouse and find a suitable one-level living option. The goal was a condominium that could be obtained at a favorable price and upgraded within a budget.

Accustomed to urban living, the couple mainly wanted freedom from stairs, available parking, and a spot for a favorite China cabinet.

"We were quite satisfied with our choice," Kathleen says of the 1,300-square-foot-unit in an 11-story, 30 year old Crystal City complex. "But after we had been in residence for about a year, we started looking for contractors to help us upgrade the master bath, which was terribly dated."

What came as a surprise as interviews got under way was how few contractors were willing or able to work in a condominium.

"There are lots of restrictions," Kathleen recalls. They learned that remodeling a room in a condo can take 20-to-30 percent longer than it takes to complete a comparable project in a single family home. "Several well-known firms wouldn't even meet with us," she said.

As such, Sarah Wolf at Foster Remodeling Solutions headquartered in Lorton was a breath of fresh air.

"We hit it off right away," Kathleen says. "She understood condo remodeling challenges completely.

So much so, in fact, that the single full bathroom slated for improvement became two, and the interior design ideas grew progressively more sophisticated.

"Condos have always been interesting to me—partly because they require very precise space plans," Wolf says. "In a tight footprint, inches make all the difference and the design effects that add to that crucial sense of spaciousness must be expertly executed. Professionally, it's exhilarating to design out of the picture the apparent limitations in a room, so that only thing an owner is aware of is how attractive the space is, and how well it works."

Beginning with a "style preferences" slide show narrated by Kathleen (who had stockpiled ideas for close to a year), Wolf began by grappling with an unyieldingly compact 220 square feet that could not be enlarged in any direction.

Removing a wall between the vanity and tub in the master bathroom, for instance, added just two inches of floor space, yet the half-wall and frameless glass space di-



The black and white art deco-style ceramic basket-weave pattern for the shower prevents slipping. As an aging-in-place consideration, Wolf, of Foster Remodeling, found room for an in-shower bench and grab bars. A hand-held shower head on a slide bar adjusts to the owners' different height requirements.



A blue-grey-black Cambria quartz counter top has been color-coordinated with vanity cabinet facings lacquered in a black-brush-applied mushroom gray stain.



Recognizing that inches count in a tight footprint that can't be expanded, Sarah Wolf at Foster Remodeling Solutions gained just two inches of floor space by removing a wall between the vanity and the tub (left); the half-wall and frameless glass space divider that now surrounds the newly installed walk-in shower (right) invites line of sight that previously didn't exist.

vider that now surrounds the newly installed walk-in shower invites a visual continuum that previously didn't exist.

More to the point, Wolf's softly textured interior design scheme provides the eye with something to enjoy, and narrow spaces now seem much wider.

"Alternation and balance are important when working with small spaces," says Wolf. "In effect, you have a three dimensional canvas formed by walls, floors, ceiling, and each side is a critical part of the whole.

When the design statement is well-made, the finished space feels peaceful, pleasant, a room you want to spend time in. Size becomes unimportant."

That said, Wolf applied considerable engineering skill in designing built-ins to satisfy precisely-measured storage requirements."

"There was nothing but an open cabinet under the vanity before," Kathleen says. "Sarah designed appropriately-sized drawers, shelves and recessed a storage spaces

The single full bathroom slated for improvement became two, and the interior design ideas grew progressively more sophisticated.

MORE: Foster Design will be at the Capital Home Show at the Dulles Expo Center Sept. 25-27 in booth 540-542, and is also offering a free remodeling and design seminar at their Lorton facility on Oct. 10, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. RSVP@FosterRemodeling.com or call 703-550-1371.

for everything. The new sense of order has been wonderful."

As an aging-in-place consideration, Wolf found room for an in-shower bench and grab bars. A hand-held shower head on a slide bar adjusts to the owners' different height requirements.

"Everything has been carefully tailored to our needs," says Kathleen. "We feel fortunate to have gotten such a winning result."

John Byrd has been writing about home improvement topics for 30 years. See more stories at www.HomeFrontsNews.com.

Elegant Organization

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Design elements can make maintaining organization throughout the school year elegant and stylish as the activities start to aggregate, notices pile up and calendars start to fill.

“Designate a location for baskets for each family member, such as the entryway or mudroom, and use them daily to keep mail [and] school notices ... organized and in one place,” said Marika Meyer of Marika Meyer Interiors. Meyer used this technique in a Potomac, Maryland home recently.

“Consider a couple baskets for each person, one for notices and one for objects such as toys that can be taken to designated spaces throughout the day.”

It makes life easier on everyone, even the smallest family members. “I also like to keep my kids’ different items for activities in tote bags or bins in our mudroom area,” said Jody Al-Saigh of Picture Perfect Organizing in Arlington. “They can

quickly grab what they need for soccer or Girl Scouts on their way out the door, rather than searching all over the house for stray items. We make it a rule that those items always live in the designated bag or bin,” said Al-Saigh. “If uniforms are washed or water bottles cleaned, for example, they are returned to that area when they are clean.”

A home’s entryway often becomes a depository for shoes, hats, gloves and other items that are removed when busy families come home after a long day. Simple shelving can offer a solution with aesthetic appeal, especially with mounds of clutter.

“If there’s space within an entry closet, install shelving along the top for hats, gloves and miscellaneous seasonal items so they can be reached easily and not fall out each time you open the door,” said Elle Hunter, director of project development, Case Design/Remodeling. “If there is currently a single shelf but room for another, consider hiring a handyman to add that extra storage. It will go a long way.”



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Diversification Could Help Real Estate Market

Home sales have increased, particularly in Fairfax County, which saw a 22 percent uptick.

BY ANDREA WORKER
THE CONNECTION

Vienna-based realtor Craig Lilly with Long and Foster agreed with how Ken Harney, the moderator for the 2015 Northern Virginia Association of Realtors (NVAR) Economic Summit, described the current year's market trends at the gathering earlier this month at the Fairview Park Marriott.

"His assessment of 2015 is on target with what I am experiencing," said Lilly. "So far, so good."

Harney, a nationally-syndicated columnist, categorized 2013 as the "rebound year" when sales and house prices seemed to be back on a roll after years of post-recession doldrums. Then 2014 started out impressively strong as well, but mid-year the market became more "restrained."

"Last Spring things were rocking," said Lilly. "I think that caused some sellers to price too aggressively too quickly in a market that was changing. That certainly had an effect on the slowdown we saw for the rest of the year."

The data for 2015 is on Harney's side. Home sales have increased, particularly in Fairfax County, which saw a 22 percent uptick in sales. Figures just released by Real Estate Business Intelligence report the second-highest level of August sales since 2006, with inventories remaining fairly healthy and time-on-the-market about equal with the same period last year. The August report also showed the average sales price of single-family homes down slightly (.02 percent), while the average price of attached homes and condominiums rose slightly.

But even those positive numbers didn't keep the summit's panellists from making presentations that leaned decidedly towards the cautionary, for both short-term real estate transactions, and the future economic health of the region.

LOOMING ON THE HORIZON is the spectre of another potential government shutdown if Congress fails to pass even a temporary budget by the end of the month. Describing the region as a "company town," and as such, somewhat "vulnerable" to Congressional activity, panellist Dr. Terry Clower, director of George Mason University's Center for Regional Analysis, said he wouldn't discount the possibility of a shutdown, despite the insistence of others that neither political party would tolerate that turn of events. Additional sequestration during a Presidential election year is also possible, he said. With a laughing



From left — Jonathan Aberman of TandemNSI, Jill Landsman, NVAR VP of Communications, and summit moderator Ken Harney at the 19th Northern Virginia Association of Realtors Economic Summit.

PHOTOS BY ANDREA WORKER/THE CONNECTION



Dr. Terry Clower, director of George Mason University's Center for Regional Analysis, provided detailed data on area employment figures, income, job sector changes and more during the Economic Summit. There was considerable note taking during his presentation.

acknowledgement of his "slight accent – I am from Texas," Clower reminded the audience that for a "good lump of the rest of the country, a government shutdown is not seen as a such a bad thing."

But for a region where almost 40 percent of the economy is directly related to federal wages and salaries, procurement and other federal activity, Clower's analogy of the "company town's" vulnerability seems right on target.

The seemingly endless "Federal Reserve Watch" for interest rate hikes was also discussed by Clower, and by Dr. Lawrence Yun, chief economist with the National Association of Realtors.

"A rate increase is coming, probably sooner rather than later, before the end of the year," predicted Yun, but he also believes that any increase will not have an immediate impact on mortgage rates.

That's an opinion that Weichert Realtors Fair Oaks managing director Lorraine Arora

for awhile," said Arora.

Lilly was more struck by Yun's powerpoints showing homeownership at a 50-year low combined with rental vacancies at a 30-year low and rents at a seven-year high. "There's some things to be thinking about as a Realtor, and really as anyone living and working in this area," he added.

In Yun's research, millennials - who currently represent a large portion of the renters - are actually the most confident about the housing situation, and despite the many obstacles to their entering the market, the majority want to eventually become homeowners. Their achievement of that goal is crucial, according to Yun, who noted that the net worth of homeowners tends to exceed that of renters.

One positive note on real estate trends by Yun that the Realtor attendees appreciated was his belief that the "trade-up" market would probably see an improvement, with potential buyers having more cash-in-hand from their current homes' sales with which to make the move. The figures show that many homes that had fallen below their original purchase price have at the least returned to parity, and in many cases even seen a modest increase in value.

Back on the subject of the "company town" dependency, Clower and Yun both argued that diversification of job sectors is critical to the region's future economic success, requiring greater regional cooperation.

SPEAKING OF ROBOTS, drones, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and the "We Work" models of sharing work, living spaces and resources, Jonathan Aberman, chairman of TandemNSI, focused on technological trends and how they would affect our daily lives. Aberman said that any region that doesn't prepare for these changes with an emphasis on affordably "educating people on how to think, rather than just how to do" will be quickly left behind.

Aberman said that more effort is needed to keep the federal dollars spent on technology and related research here at home. "We need to be encouraging our next generation of 'gazelles,' what we call our fast-growth companies and entrepreneurs. And we need to consider that these people will be more interested in data-ways than high-ways when considering their work options."

To Aberman, that includes rethinking the number of "trophy offices" under construction and in the pipeline. He worries about over-building in commercial properties that sit empty for so long that they cease to be Class A buildings. Before they can be occupied, many are already not up to par for the next wave of change, either technologically, or culturally speaking, he said.

Lorraine Arora tends to agree with Aberman's concerns. "Look at the commercial vacancy rates in Arlington, as just one example," she said. She was also fascinated by Aberman's predictions on technology's influence on society in the very near future.

"It's a little concerning," she said. Technology is good, but I hope we don't get to the point where people just don't leave their homes."



Rob Whitfield, a member of several regional transportation citizens' groups including the Dulles Corridor Users Group, asks a question of the panellists.

shares. "People will still be buying and selling. I think the current situation continues to make people a bit cautious, as Yun suggests, but I agree that we probably won't see much impact on mortgage rates, at least