

PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OLDER PERSONS

INTRODUCING NEW TECHNOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION:

My client is a senior citizen, self-employed, Post-Polio victim who uses a wheelchair. Her prognosis is quadriplegia within two years. Working at home, she sees clients on a regular basis. She lives alone, but a daily caretaker comes in and assists her with household chores and some personal care. Although she uses the microwave for most of her daily food preparation, and stovetop cooking is minimal, she still wants to be able to make a roast or a turkey when she has family over for holidays. She desires to live independently for as long as she is able. She is concerned about the exterior aesthetics of her home, retaining its resale value, and keeping the dining room intact for entertaining.

GOAL:

To create an environment that will enable the client to live at home and work for as long as possible. Respecting the desire for aesthetics and concern for the resale value, I wanted to introduce the latest technology that will be easy to use, readily available and easily serviced.

SELECTED PROBLEM AREAS AND SOLUTIONS:

Entry into the house:

The existing concrete ramp, located in the rear of the house, is too steep for the electric wheelchair to traverse safely. The landing is not sized properly for her to open or close the exterior door. Her garage and front entry have five steps, at a 28" rise from the ground, and small landings. She has no easy way to enter or leave her home.

Solutions with options:

- A. Front door entry: Create a birn (a gently sloping walkway) to the rise of 28" (9":1") from the driveway. Landscape properly to create an aesthetically appealing entry. Extend the existing landing to measure no less than 6' x 7' within a new covered porch. Install an electric eye to automate existing or new doors. Features of electric units should include latching from both inside and out.
- B. Garage Door entry: Enlarge kitchen doorway. Install an automatic lift within the garage to the kitchen. Install an automatic door opener as above.

Personal closet space in master bedroom:

The existing closet door opening is 30" and the door swings into the bedroom. The interior closet is 45" deep by 60" wide. It butts up on the width side to another storage area in the adjacent room. Shelves and rods are too high; there is no shoe or accessory storage within easy reach.

Solution options

1. Open wall in bedroom to the width of the closet; use Bi-fold doors or curtains. Lower top shelf to 54", hanging rods to 48". On sidewalls, install shelving and racks for bags, scarves, shoes, etc. Install automatic light control.

2. Widen space by opening up closet into space that it abuts. Treat the doors in similar fashion as above.

Kitchen:

The kitchen has no turn around space, a peninsula that is used as a snack bar, and no accessible storage. There is a wall oven that is not accessible by either frontal or side approach, and the four-burner stovetop has controls in the rear. The refrigerator has a top mount freezer and can only be accessed by side approach. The large microwave sits on a cart in front of the oven. The kitchen area has access to the garage by five steps, has access to rear ramp through a pantry, utility area, and has access to front door.

Solution:

- A. Eliminate peninsula. Install a new counter 32 ½" from floor, 24" deep, with a pull out counter, on same side as sink with pull out storage underneath.
- B. Replace existing base cabinets with cabinets that are 32 ½" from floor, have 9" toe kicks, accessible sink and stovetop openings.
- C. Make sink accessible by installing rear drain double sink and rear plumbing, pocket doors with no toe kick.
- D. Opposite the sink replace the 24" counter with an 18" counter to accommodate two coil burners side by side, vent overhead, open space underneath. Controls for stove top and vents to be in front or on apron of counter.
- E. Install oven into wall common to garage at waist height, controls no higher than 45" so that door to oven opens at 32 ½" high next to the new 18" counter.
- F. Install microwave, counter height or underneath, on the side of new counter for eating.
- G. Counter for eating to have pull out shelf for additional work surface and eating area. The pull out will give knee clearance for frontal use.
- H. Replace existing refrigerator with larger side by side unit, 24" deep.
- I. Rework receptacles and light switches to be no higher than 45" from floor.

Bathroom:

The bathroom is situated next to the bedroom. The hallway from the bedroom does not have adequate space to turn into the bathroom easily. The bedroom door swings in toward the vanity. The vanity is not accessible and is difficult to use. She can not close the door for privacy. There is no turn around space and she backs out when leaving. Linen storage shares the space with the water heater for the bathroom opposite a bathtub. Neither the tub nor the closet is accessible. She finds it difficult to get in and out of the tub. There is another door in the bedroom that opens to this water heater closet. The water closet can be used but has no equipment for personal hygiene.

Solutions:

- A. Remove the closet with the water heater.
- B. Remove the wall heater.
- C. Remove the existing window and replace with a celestory style window.
- D. Remove bathtub and create a roll-in shower.
- E. Install space heater through vent in ceiling and water heater in either the new storage unit on the side of the vanity or in a closet near the bedroom. This will require plumbing and electrical work underneath the house. There are small wall hung water

heater units that can be used instead of the large ones. Access from the bedroom could then be easily achieved either by lift (if needed) or chair from the left side of the bed. If a lift is required then the wall over the doorway has to be removed and longer door installed.

- F. If a tub is recommended for therapy then a transfer seat or lift can be installed.
- G. The roll in shower should be fitted with bench for easy transfer.
- H. Install a remote controlled shower spray and body dryer.
- I. The water closet can be fitted with a bidet unit to facilitate personal hygiene.
- J. The vanity should be an open counter, remote controlled faucet and soap dispenser and appropriate measures taken to shield water pipes.
- K. The hallway door can be a shoji (sliding pocket door) or bi-fold doors with an interior lock mechanism.