

Design For Kids

I admit that at "over forty" I'm not a kid anymore. I still *feel* like a kid sometimes, but that's starting to get balanced by times when I feel like an old man. I do love kids, however. Heck, I've even got a couple of them myself!

When we were planning our last remodel, I did my best to include Kimberly and Tessa in our planning, even though at four and five years of age they weren't able to articulate their ideas or concerns as well as my wife, Kris, and I could.

If you've been to our house, though, you'd notice the evidence of their efforts. Their room has a door to our balcony overlooking our modestly sized but richly landscaped backyard. Their room also has liberal shelving, packed now with books and stuffed animals. Their closet has rods at their height, and a place for all their shoes. We even have a secret hiding spot with a kid sized door to it overlooking our entry. The door is paneled just like our front door - in fact, it's actually the original front door, cut down and turned sideways. Their list might be different, and actually the features they enjoy now at seven and eight are not the same ones they delighted in when we first moved back in.

Actually, kids are at the heart of a great number of addition and remodeling projects. Some are driven by the demands of kids old enough to clearly state what they need and why. Some projects result because there are more of them (kids) on the way. Others result because their increasing size and geometrically increasing collections of possessions seem to demand ever increasing amounts of space. Despite the fact that kids are one of the most important driving forces behind remodeling in the first place, it's easy to forget to involve them in the design process. That's a mistake for several reasons. First, children need to be kept informed about what is going on in a household. That can

help to reduce their anxieties, and make it easier for them to enjoy and appreciate the end result. After all, inconvenience is an inevitable part of remodeling and adding on. Kids take on their share of suffering from the inconvenience during the process. They need to see the bright side of things - that vision for a better home when the project is finished - for the inconvenience to be bearable on the way to getting there. That vision should be periodically refreshed, since that "bright side" that makes it all worthwhile is often literally months away.

Secondly, without talking to your children about their programs, you may miss some great opportunities that will add to their use and enjoyment of the finished design. Remember that *their* enjoyment contributes to *your* enjoyment and satisfaction of doing a great job in planning, as well as the "ease of living" that your house will have in the end.

Most of the time when I'm helping a family plan for an addition, the first tendency is to leave the kids out of the planning. If you participated in the planning workshops I've conducted for the Sacramento Aquarium Committee at Belle Coolidge Library, you probably expected me to say, "Welcome them to all the sessions". After all, that's what we did at these lively workshops, and the "kids" had wonderful and innovative ideas to contribute! The freedom they felt to brainstorm and express their enthusiasm was contagious, and greatly contributed to the fun and excitement of our sessions.

It's a bit different when you're dealing with a personal program that involves as much time and money as planning for an addition or remodel, however. It isn't realistic to expect young children to sit through lengthy programming meetings. The novelty and interest quickly wears off, and as they resort to their "usual tricks" to command your attention, you won't be able to take care of the

real issue at hand very effectively. Older kids can be involved more - you have to use your

own judgment and be realistic about that "invisible line" that can be crossed in a seeming nanosecond when things change from happy to heavy. You also have to figure the cost of time into the mix. After all, if you're paying your designer by the hour, your patience for interruptions, delays, and any form of inefficiency is going to be minimal.

planning process, and some examples of ideas that they've contributed to my clients' homes!

copyright 1994 Michael F. Malinowski

Join me in my next column, when I'll share some thoughts on how to involve kids in the