

Design For Kids Part Two

Many addition/remodel projects start because of kids. There are either more of them on the way, they've outgrown their spaces, or the family is cramped because of all the stuff and activities that go along with kids. It's important to involve kids in the process of planning for a remodel/addition. Not only will that reduce stress and family friction, you'll discover some good ideas that will contribute to everyone's enjoyment of the finished result.

So, just how can you reasonably get kids involved? Letting a five year old sit through a three hour program meeting is going to be a painful experience for everyone involved. It could also be an expensive waste of time and money. If you don't get the job done, you'll either have to pay to have another meeting, or you'll get frustrated enough to just plow ahead without carefully considering just what your real objectives and constraints are.

Older children can contribute on their own terms. Some will be happy writing a list of concerns. Don't worry that "everything on the list" is going to be gospel to the designer, possibly tossing budget out the window. A good designer can get at the root of issues, and address them in spirit if not literally. A teenager that demands a huge bedroom to accommodate tons of "stuff" can be satisfied with carefully planned shelving or built-ins instead, if they know their concerns are being listened to and taken seriously. It is often best to let them develop their list on their own, so they don't feel that they need "approval" to put things on it. It becomes "public property" open for discussion after it is put on the table with other family issues.

Let the designer take first crack at sorting through and prioritizing. Many times clever use of space can make seemingly unsolvable conflicts evaporate. Why waste family energy and spirit tackling issues that may get resolved on their own?

Even younger kids - three year olds, for example, should be brought into the process. You can do that in just a few minutes by allowing the Designer or Architect to touch base with them and put some attention on asking them. They will generally be thrilled that they have been given that importance. Even if they come up with only a couple of seemingly "off the wall" requests, the simple act of asking them can get them excited and supportive of the project as a whole. That is always a worthwhile goal, good for family harmony.

You might also be surprised at how some of their "seemingly off the wall" suggestions turn out to be great ideas. They may not always be able to articulate exactly what is important to them, but by giving them a chance to participate you may find some design concepts that add unique and exciting details for everyone to enjoy. It may also be that they may help shape something unique for themselves. Some examples from some of our past projects follow.

Bat Caves. Some kids love small places, especially if they can claim them as their own. In our office, we tend to call these bat caves whether they are dark and remote (like the moniker might suggest), or a bright and open roof dormer. Usually we can fashion a bat cave out of left over space - say the small, triangular space behind a knee wall, or even a little cubby in a base cabinet.

These kind of personal and unique spaces will shape childhood memories that will stick with your children for the rest of their lives. They work best if they have a "door", and if they are sized no bigger than say five by five. They can work with spaces much smaller than that. It is important to consider things like ventilation and safety, so please don't just put an access on that unfinished attic area and call it a bat cave!

Alcoves. You don't have to be a child to enjoy the pleasure that a small window seat or reading alcove can give. Even just the sense of enclosure created defines a unique space - perfect for curling up with a favorite book on a rainy winter day. Say, that sounds so good. Let's plan one for Mom and Dad, too! Sometimes function gets a bit more of an upper hand, and an alcove becomes a

Study Alcove. This is a good trick for programs that demand a study, but are coupled with budgets that can't provide the square footage they normally require. A Study Alcove can be as small as four by five and accommodate the school needs of a teenager. When we add doors, the mess of a *working* study can be made to vanish instantly - perfect for most teenager's room habits!

Join us in our next column while we explore more examples of Design for Kids

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