



Little Big House

A small home that feels and functions beyond its limited size

by Julie Foster

When they decided to build a new house in East Sacramento, Ed Pandolfino and Kathleen Lynch knew exactly what they wanted: rooms engulfed in natural light, high ceilings, efficient use of space and energy, and ADA accommodations within a modestly sized structure.

Working with local architect Michael Malinowski, they were faced with both a challenge and an opportunity. Situating a 1,500-square-foot contemporary-style home on a long, narrow infill lot posed a chance to create a home that feels and functions “big” within a small footprint.

The couple’s initial plans included ADA modifications. Lynch will soon require dual knee replacements and recovery time at home. And the couple has friends who are wheelchair bound.

“Plus anything could happen to either of us at these ages,” says Lynch, who is 70. (Pandolfino is 63.)

To



make the house accessible to all, doors are 36 inches wide. Toilets, showers and tubs sport stylish grab bars. The shower in the master bath is doorless and has a roll-in entrance.

The elegantly spare kitchen cabinets by Asa's Cabinetry in Williams were designed without cabinet pulls. The kitchen drawers feature an easy-close mechanism and roll out for easy access. "That way, there is no losing stuff in the deep, dark recesses of a cabinet because you can't see it or get to it," Lynch says.

The gently curved island's granite top coordinates with the countertop's porcelain tiles. Lynch chose the two complementary materials with intention. "With all one material, it made the space seem like a Hospital," she says.



"Porcelain tiles are harder, last longer and are more heat resistant than ceramic tile," Pandolfino adds.

Catering to the couple's desire for lots of light in every room, windows are strategically located, often outlined with glass blocks for additional light and interest. High ceilings in the living room, dining room and kitchen and a slanted ceiling in the master bedroom create a heightened sense of spaciousness.

The home's green features include low-E vinyl windows oriented to avoid summer sun and maximize winter light. A huge deciduous pecan tree on the south side of the house provides full shade all summer and allows winter sunlight in. Closed-cell foam provides insulation, while LED lights illuminate the home. A tankless water heater and Energy Star appliances boost efficiency.

Sustainable materials include Forest Stewardship Council-certified lumber,

bamboo flooring and carpets made from SmartStrand Triexta, a corn-based product. The commodious outdoor deck was constructed from a wood alternative: eco-friendly Trex decking.

Dual-flush toilets save on water use inside the house. Conservation of outside water is achieved through the use of pavers containing a drainage system of perforated lines. The small lawn is decorated with drought-tolerant plants.

Throughout the house, the couple used zero-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint for the walls and glue for the bamboo flooring. Rather than glue the carpeting in place, they tacked down.

Pandolfino's upstairs office is his favorite room. A Murphy bed converts the space into a spacious guest room with a treetop view. The room is a pleasant spot for watching the numerous birds stopping by at multiple feeding stations outside.

Lynch equally admires the master bedroom, the deck and the kitchen-living area.

"I love-love-love our kitchen/living room setup, which accommodates just the two of us or our huge

extended family," she explains. "We've comfortably seated 26 to 30 for Christmas dinner and birthdays."



The couple offers some sound advice for anyone considering building a home.

"Make sure your marriage is on very solid ground—seriously," says Pandolfino. "So many decisions to be made. One thing we did, in more of an 'organic' rather than a conscious way, is to divide areas of decision-making into two categories, some really pure joint decisions, some where one person had the primary role with the other having final veto power."

Adds Lynch, "Compromise and create solutions together with your partner, architect, builder and subs."

She advises making a list of questions, wishes and priorities that both partners consider essential. "You will find you've missed things or forgotten

something," she says. "If it doesn't pass the Deathbed Test—ie., will it be on your mind still troubling you while you're dying?—then let it go."

The newly built house surpassed the couple's expectations.

"There isn't anything we would have done differently," Pandolfino says.

If you know of a home you think should be featured in Inside Publications, contact Julie Foster at foster.julie91@yahoo.com