

Designing an aging-in-place remodel brings together two Holocaust survivors

BONNIE J. LEWIS | SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH NEWS

Dr. Ron Barnes wanted to unite his mother and aunt under one roof. As Holocaust survivors in their 90s, and not able to get out much to visit one another, he knew that living together would bring them companionship and great joy.

Barnes' mother, Rose, was recently widowed and no longer happy at the Scottsdale senior living community where she'd lived for eight years. She wanted to move. Finding another nice senior living community wouldn't be difficult, but luckily, Barnes' widowed aunt, Mary, lived in her own Scottsdale home, loved it and did not want to leave. Barnes then pondered whether Mary's home could be designed and remodeled for aging-in-place to make the home safer and accommodate the ladies (Rose has mild dementia and Mary has Alzheimer's disease) and a full-time caregiver.

For the most part, when retrofitting a home for aging in place, grab bars, ramps and wider doorways are a must. However, such changes can mar the look of a beautifully designed home. But with the help of a senior living interior designer, there is a way to have form and function in a home for those aging in place.

After assessing a home, a general plan is formulated. For Mary's home, the design-remodel objectives were to include a first-floor master suite that was updated, beautiful and, above all, safe. The 1980s home needed a lot of work to achieve these objectives. For example, the first-floor bathroom was small, tight, difficult to maneuver in, thus rendering it dangerous as well as restrictive for the caregiver to assist with showering. The home also had a sunken living room and stairs to the second-floor bedrooms.

A new, ADA- and fire code-compliant floor plan for the first floor was designed to incorporate the existing footprint. Although Mary, Rose and their caregiver liked the new design because it was safer, Mary's one concern was that her home wouldn't be beautiful. That's a valid

concern, since most providers of aging-in-place remodeling or modifications are just focused on safety products such as grab bars, ramps or very basic retrofitting of bathrooms, which are typically institutional-looking and not very attractive.

Working with a senior living interior designer, a comprehensive, holistic approach to fully achieve a safe, functional, accessible, beautiful living environment can be achieved. A good senior living interior designer can design for physical, emotional and psychological wellness. It's art and science, requiring a whole lot more than just grab bars or ramps. Most designers partner with licensed contractors and oversee the project, making it stress-free.

Through such highly specialized design skills, life was made better for Rose and Mary. The floor plan was reconfigured to create a spacious first-floor master suite and a new powder room. Both feature custom-designed, wheelchair-accessible vanities, and the new shower is curbless. Now, there's one level floor with slip-resistant material throughout.

"This is heaven," the caretaker said. "The shower is so much easier and safer to use. And, it's so beautiful!"

A stair lift was added for safe, easy navigation to the second floor. Proper lighting



Living room before, below, and after, above, turned the sunken living room into one level with non-slip flooring, as well as stair lifts to the second floor.

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Bathroom before, above, and after, below, showcase how design can make an aging-in-place home remodel functional and beautiful.

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for aging eyes was added throughout. ADA-compliant materials, fixtures, door hardware and appliances were installed. Senior-friendly colors and dementia-supportive design elements were strategically incorporated into the design. The elegant, yet contemporary design aesthetic pleased the entire

family, and the aging-in-place remodel has increased the home’s value.

“My mother and aunt both love the remodel,” Barnes said. “They are happy and comfortable thanks this innovative design.” **JN**

Bonnie J. Lewis, Allied ASID, Assoc. IIDA, CAPS, is the founder of 55+ TLC Interior Design LLC.