

For MD Couple, Renovation "Just Like a New Baby!"



It all began with a broken burner. Needing to purchase a new stove when their old one began to fail, Kirk and Larke Huang began to consider revamping their outdated kitchen and dining area, and opening up space to eliminate clutter. But the more they thought about the changes their 24-year-old home really needed, the more the couple contemplated their "aging in place" requirements.

Like many empty nesters, the Huangs wanted a home tailored to fit their future requirements and those of their aging parents. **"We wanted to create a more livable space that accommodated our needs and enhanced what we have,"** Kirk says. "Also to add areas that might enhance the value of the property."

In addition to the redesigned and expanded kitchen, Jerry Liu and Senior Designer Chris Hambrecht created an easily accessible, full bathroom on the first floor of the house, then renovated the family room, laundry area, master bath, and patio. One highlight included opening up the breakfast area with a desk space and floating shelves (pieces of glass slid into the wall). This

helped eliminate clutter, and brought in light from the large picture windows in the two-story family room. A mudroom or "owner's vestibule" as Chris calls it, was created off the garage, along with a laundry pantry area and a skylight in the dining area. Eventually, the project encompassed the addition of two banks of closets in the master bathroom, and exterior gutter work to repair damage from winter storms.

Although the couple worked together as a team, their unique approaches to the project could not have been more different. "Kirk is very trust oriented, kind of a hand-shake, gentleman's feel-good thing," Chris says. "Larke is extremely organized—needs details, pictures and numbers, and is very visual. We did a lot of drawings before we had them both nodding their heads and agreeing."

Building a solid relationship with clients is always important, but in the Huang's case, it was crucial—and beneficial for both sides. **"We weren't even done with the job before Mr. Huang started referring people to us,"** Jerry recalls. "Referrals are our life's blood, and that's a big responsibility—

to not betray that trust. Now we're doing two other projects right in his neighborhood."

Asked if they worried about undertaking a project like this in today's economy, Kirk says the long-term benefits outweighed the concerns. "I suspect the financial aspects will be unique to each family," he says. "But we had equity in our home, as it was paid off. We made the decision to enjoy it, hopefully for a number of years, and weighed the cost of renovation against the even more staggering cost of buying a new home with potentially less space in a location that might not be half as good."

The Huangs are quite happy with their decision, and thrilled with both the process and results. "The construction crew and contractors were superb," he says. "Every day we come downstairs to our new kitchen eating area and are delighted. Just like a new baby!" In fact, he explains, the whole project felt almost like they were expecting. **"We set it in motion, watched it mature, and couldn't wait for the delivery. Larke and I treasure it as something we created together."**

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STAFF PROFILE



Meet Senior Designer Chris Hambrecht

Although Chris has been with us less than a year, he is a prized member of the DG Liu team, and especially enjoys the problem solving aspects of his job. "I love creating design solutions," he says, "the idea of exploring different approaches to the same issue and weighing the pros and cons, while keeping within a client's budget."

While we already consider him an artist of home design, Chris is also becoming known as an accomplished cartoonist. "I started doodling for my church," he says, "doing cartoons for a newsletter, and was encouraged to share them with more people." Now his cartoons are sent each month to more than 600 churches around the world, and are translated into five different languages. To see a sample, check out www.emdoodle.com.

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