



New old home

Lori and Lee Zajic remodeled their house for the Tour of Remodeled Homes

BY MIKEL KELLY

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Lee and Lori Zajic learned a huge lesson with their last remodeled home – even after 30 years in the business.

"We've become a lot more sympathetic with what people have to go through because we've been through it," says Lori, as they paused from putting the finishing touches on their drastic remodel of a Rock Creek-area ranch house. "We've lived it."

"I think now that we've gone through it, we have more of a concern for our clients," adds Lee, Lori's husband and business partner in NW Renovations & Design Co.

Their home (and it is theirs; they've been living there since last May) is one of 18 remodeling projects in this year's Tour of Remodeled Homes set for March 6 and 7 (see box).

"A remodel is an invasive procedure," says Lee Zajic. "It's like surgery. Nobody's prepared for it. But when it's over, it's the best thing that ever happened."

What the Zajics have been through is not exactly typical. The 1,800-square-foot house they spotted from the Rock Creek Country Club fairway really no longer exists. They tore it down to the floorboards and built a whole new home – and not just any home, but one they would want to live in for a long time.

Previously in a two-story house in Terra Linda and now in their mid-50s, the Zajics knew they wanted this place to be comfortable and accommodating as they head into their "senior" years.

So, they knew it needed to be all on one level. They made sure all the doors were extra wide, in case wheelchairs need to get through them. They raised all the ceilings to 10 feet, just to make it feel roomy and open.

And, speaking of open, they created one massive great room inside the front door, with living, kitchen and dining space all spread across one vast oak floor on 10-inch planks.

Gone were the tiny rooms, the aluminum wiring, noisy old pipes and single-pane windows of the original structure, and in their place is a modern, large-windowed home with cool colors and an occasional accent wall wearing big-print wallpaper.

Everywhere you look are clean, sleek lines and more drawers and cabinets than you can shake a tape measure at.

"When we first started this, we went a lot of different ways, just like clients do," says Lori. But, she says, they finally settled on the decision to "deconstruct it" and add 500 square feet – putting it a respectable 2,300.

"What we wanted to do, first of all, was move into one level," she says, "into something that was designed with universal access. We wanted it to have aspects of universal design through all the areas."

"We designed it for ourselves," she says with a smile.

The new home has a large his-and-hers office just off the entryway for both of the Zajics and which will also do double duty as an extra sleep-over space, thanks to a sleeper sofa, and even a music room, as demonstrated by the closeted upright piano.

Not far away is the large guest bedroom with its own bath. On the opposite end of the house, beyond

the great room, is the master bedroom suite with accompanying walk-in closet and wide-doored shower that requires no stepping over a threshold.

Three outdoor living areas – accessible from the office and living room, as well as the front porch – take advantage of the wooded neighborhood and the golf course that stretches past a row of patio doors in the living room.

“I did a lot of the work myself, being in the remodeling business,” said Lee. And, although he subbed out many of the more specialized chores, as most contractors would, he did put in the wood floors, the tile and all the finish carpentry.

Lori explains that they are CAPS builders (Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists) trained to take into account needs of aging homeowners. “When we’re doing work for people, these are things that need to be brought to people’s attention,” she says, pointing out that even if the owner doesn’t want grab bars installed in a bathroom, they might later, so one needs to consider reinforcing the walls.

“All of that can be done in a tasteful manner,” she says.

Also, she adds, this is also an Energy Star-certified home.

“We really like what we do,” Lee insists. “Remodeling is a service industry, not a product. The impact that you can have on a family can be catastrophic, if you don’t back it up.”

The home is also the base of operation for the Zajics’ business, which has been combined into one since 1992.

Lee was president of Home Builders Association in 2007, and he served as first president of the Tour of Remodeled Homes and has twice chaired the event’s board.

“We were one of the companies that brought the tour to the Portland area because we saw it in Seattle,” says Lori. The first one held here was in 2000. “We usually put a project in every other year.”

And, speaking of firsts, their neighborhood was the site of the first Street of Dreams, back in 1976.

“We don’t regret what we did,” says Lee of the ambitious project that is about to be put on view for the public. “It was time to move.”

Lee and Lori Zajic’s NW Renovations & Design Co. can be reached at 503-617-4800, or visit www.nwrenovationsanddesign.com.

EVENT AND ADMISSION INFO

This year’s Tour of Remodeled Homes includes 18 projects.

- Show hours – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, March 6 and 7.
- Admission – Ticket Price is \$17.50 and good for both days. Tickets went on sale Feb. 22.
- More info – Information about the tour and participating remodelers is available at www.remodeltourportland.com.
- How to purchase tickets – Tickets can be purchased online at www.RemodelTourPortland.com or by calling 503-684-1880. People attending have two options: (1) By buying tickets online, you will receive an immediate e-mail with directions to the all homes featured on the tour. Download your ticket and map and go on the tour; or (2) Visit the Tour of Remodeled Homes Web site the day of the event where you will find a listing of four starter homes. Pick the home closest to you and purchase your tickets at the door.