

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Adaptability and beauty can work together in a senior's own home

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

THE MOMENT she walks into a house, Helaine Tregenza feels the energy of the place. The interior designer doesn't just see the design of the building or the sensibilities of the owner. She connects with the space, which is what happened when she first entered her own 1950s bungalow in Del Rey Oaks. Although a house evolves with each resident, she said, she is only the second owner and could see it remained basically as it had been built.

Tregenza has made minor changes to her home over the years, yet hasn't altered its aesthetics — particularly in the kitchen, where the gas range reminds her of a '57 Chevy.

Additional changes will be made over time, as needed, to enable her to remain in her home for many years to come. As a certified aging-in-place specialist, she does the same for clients throughout the Monterey Peninsula.

Prolonging independence

When Tregenza was in school and learning about universal design — the composition and development of an environment so it can be used to the greatest extent by all residents, regardless of age, size, ability or disability — she thought of the demographics of this area and the needs of an aging population, most of whom want to remain in their homes as long as possible.

"Home really is where the heart is," she said. "If you have a home you love, instead of leaving it as you age, why not adapt it to your changing needs? There is a lot we can do to prolong independent living. Let's change aspects of someone's home, instead of their address."

Interior design came to Tregenza as a third career. Having worked in travel publishing in New York, she shifted to business magazine publishing and launched Pebble Beach — the Magazine, followed by the Monterey Peninsula Guide.

Beautiful solutions

Yet Tregenza has always been enamored of art and design. She collected art, and got excited about furniture auctions as if they were rock concerts. Her father was a fine artist who also worked in commercial art. Ultimately, she decided to convert her passions into a career and became an interior designer.



PHOTO/MICHELLE MAGDALEN

"While contractors make decisions in building the house, I turned my attention to the interior design," she said. "I was in awe that someone could transform an interior space to better suit the aesthetics and lifestyle of the occupant. I saw the benefit of pairing practical decisions with artistic appeal."

So, Tregenza enrolled at Monterey Peninsula College to train under department chair Sunshine Geisler.

"Interior design has a lot of different sides," Tregenza

said. "Yes, it's about beautiful fabrics and furniture, paint colors, art objects, lighting and room arrangement. But it's also about problem solving. I begin by seeking to understand a person's tastes and sensibilities, their lifestyle and how they utilize their rooms, to design a space that solves their problems."

Amid the challenges, Tregenza finds her work exciting

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and satisfying.

Many years into her design career, Tregenza was introduced to the research and vision of Dr. Ken Dychtwald, a gerontologist and author who explored the dynamics of an aging generation that is getting ready to retire from their careers, but not their lives. In looking at her own household and the demographics of her community, she decided to return to school and earn her certification as an aging-in-place specialist.

"Being certified means I have the knowledge base and authority over what I'm advising. I work with clients from the perspective of what will make their homes more livable, what will support the lifestyles they are now living and their needs, going forward."

Lightening up

That may mean upgrading the lighting in the room, eliminating tripping hazards, adding grab bars in the bathroom, and rearranging furniture to create a better, safer flow through rooms. It also may mean converting a bedroom abandoned by grown children into a den, a crafts room, or the space where someone will finally sit down to write their book.

"In a recent project, we painted dark hallways a lighter color and increased the lighting with recessed lights. We put in light fixtures and switches to make it easy for clients to light their way through the house. We added grab bars to the shower and made it curb-less to remove a tripping hazard. We replaced furniture that had sharp edges. We also moved the master bedroom downstairs, so residents no longer had to climb a steep staircase at night. Why tempt fate?"

Tregenza said that sometimes, it just takes a pair of fresh, well-trained eyes to see what's possible, what's safer, and how to get there — with the added benefit of a creative aesthetic. It's the way she looks at her own house, as well.



A fireplace facelift is beautiful — and makes it easier to have a fire whenever the spirit moves.

