

CotY Awards Category 13-43 Universal Design—Interiors

Every once in a blue moon you run into a client who is very forward thinking. This homeowner was such a client. After a diagnosis, the homeowner found herself more reliant on her motorized scooter to get around, even at home. The homeowner lives in a high rise condo. We had previously done a Universal Design kitchen and bath update in her current condo unit back in 2011. A recently purchased a second unit would be redesigned to be a perfect home for her to Age in Place. The homeowner wanted to redesign this new condo to be 100% accessible and also allow for space for a future live-in care provider. This is the definition of planning ahead to Age in Place!

Along with our team members, we designed a more open floor plan for the kitchen and living areas. A front entry closet was removed to turn a dead end galley kitchen into a flowing space that is not only more roomy, but also has two access points. The kitchen is all Universal Design; forward controls on the cook top, modified lower cabinets to house electrical outlets that are easy to reach, lower countertop height for food prep and a sink with an special push button for the disposal. Even the faucet has a sensor that changes from blue to red as the water temperature increases. New hardwood floors throughout the living room, kitchen and two bedrooms, make clunky room transitions a thing of the past for this homeowner.

The next space tackled was the master suite. The removal of the laundry room from the bathroom allowed for a spacious roll-in shower to replace an unsafe whirlpool tub. An open vanity with roomy accessible cabinets were installed. The laundry room was completely re-imagined and relocated to a large open walk in closet. All of these rooms can be separated from the rest of the condo by a single pocket door, which was chosen for its ease of use and extra chunky hardware which is easy to grasp. This master suite definitely is an accessible oasis for the homeowner.

Like any project there are obstacles that pop up. Working in a condominium is an obstacle in and of itself. The extra time and scheduling required for deliveries and subcontractors is immense. Additionally, many units in the building are tied together with their electrical, water and other utility services. This requires efficient and careful planning so as to not inconvenience the other homeowners. There were also challenges more specific to this particular unit's remodel. The wiring for the building intercom system ran through a common space in each unit of the building —the front closet. To eliminate this closet and open up the kitchen, we had to install an access panel in the ceiling to house some of the wiring. A small post and ledge was also added to hide the remaining wires. Cabinetry was modified by our skilled craftsman to accommodate drainpipes and structural columns that could not be moved or to add electrical (switches, outlets, lights) in places where the homeowner needed them to be. In the end, it was completely worth the struggles to be able to give the homeowner what she needed in this kitchen.

Communication on this project was an extra challenge. For health reasons, the homeowner lives in a warmer climate in the winter. This makes communication so important especially when discoveries are made that effect the plans or when selecting locations for switches and lighting, paint and finish choices, etc. We were fortunate that our homeowner recognized the communication challenges of a long distance remodel and made extra efforts to keep the communication, and the project, flowing.

As the homeowner envisioned, this space is completely functionally and aesthetically altered. It is a beautiful, colorful, accessible home customized to her needs. The homeowner can move effortlessly from room to room in her motorized scooter. The well-appointed kitchen is filled with Universal Design elements that make meal preparation no longer a challenge. The master suite is more open and obstacles removed. From the before photos you will see the run of the mill fixtures, the plain walls and ordinary cabinetry. The homeowner, who studies the human response to color, carefully selected each hue in the newly remodeled space to create a home that will uplift and soothe the spirit. You can see her personality in each and every space, making this Universal Design remodel not just functional, but beautiful and a reflection of her indomitable spirit.



AFTER



BEFORE

Homeowner Goal—1 Create an open and accessible kitchen— The old galley kitchen had only one narrow point of access from the living room. The counter dividing the kitchen from the living space was bar height, too high for accessibility. The redesigned kitchen now has direct access from the front door as well as its original access. The counter top has been lowered and wide sweeping granite has seating for the homeowner to entertain. The homeowner is a color consultant and carefully chose all of the bright hues seen on the walls. When standing in the space it feels lively, yet soothing.



AFTER



BEFORE

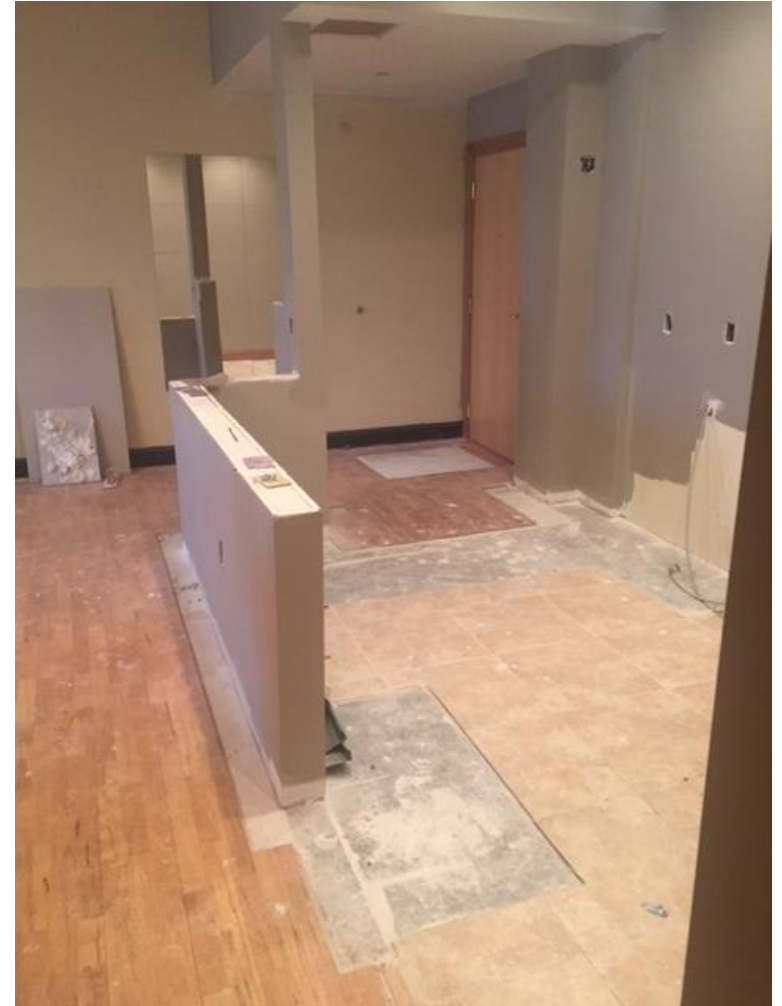
BEFORE: The dead end galley kitchen was narrow and had little room to maneuver. The counter areas were cut up and there was no room for two cooks in the kitchen, especially when opening and closing the oven door. **AFTER:** The new kitchen is very open with great lighting. The switches and outlets are all reachable for the homeowner. There is ample room for two or more to cook side by side in this inspired space.



Universal Design Elements (L to R) — The kitchen is loaded with Universal Design touches. The convection oven, hood fan, cooktop, and dishwasher are all installed at a height that is comfortable for the homeowner while seated. The cooktop features controls towards the front of the appliance so the homeowner does not have to reach over burners to activate. Lower cabinets next to the cooktop are modified to make room for outlets, where the homeowner can reach them. Drawers are part of the design concept instead of cabinet doors to allow the homeowner to have full access to the contents. The 'D' shaped hardware is also a stylish UD touch. Additionally, the dishwasher drawer makes it a practical choice for accessibility allowing for ease of access. The super cool faucet has a light indicator that changes from blue to red as the water temperature increases to prevent scalds. The disposal activates with a discrete push button air switch mounted near the faucet. This type of switch is easier to activate when hand strength is a concern. This project proves yet again that meeting Universal Design requirements need not sacrifice style and beauty.



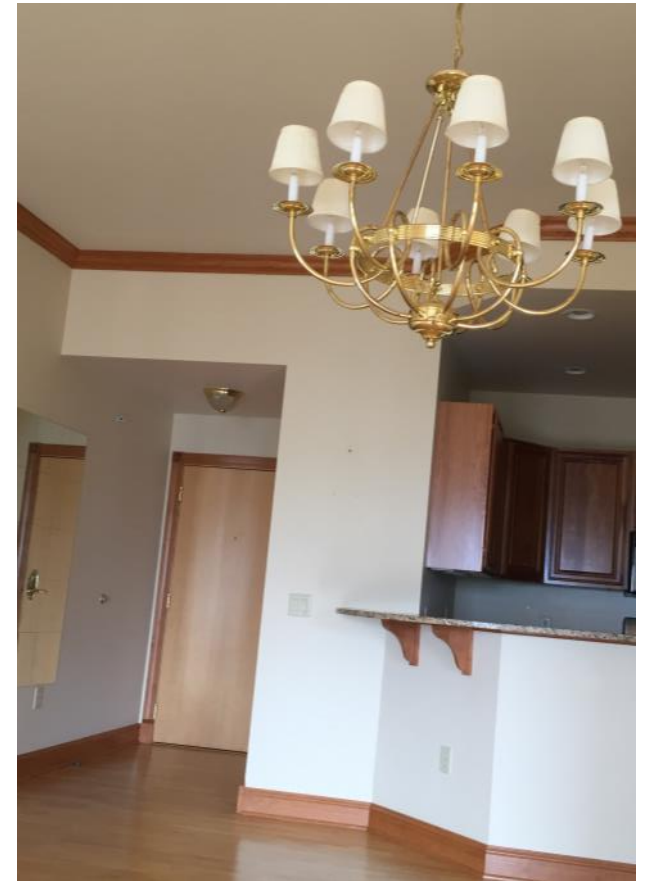
Universal Design Elements (L to R) — A new continuous hardwood floor runs throughout the kitchen, living area and two bedrooms. This limits the transitions of the flooring to just the bathrooms. Having a continuous floor throughout makes moving around the home easier for the homeowner. A wider entry into the kitchen helps with added maneuverability as well. Special brackets were used to hold the heavy granite peninsula eliminating the need for a support leg and keeping the underside open for accessibility. The baseboard was painted black to provide more contrast against the wood floors. The vibrant colors on the walls not only inspire but serve the practical purpose of providing contrast between rooms.



Project Obstacle 1 —Work with existing utilities, flooring —(L to R): The electrical for other floors in the condo building ran behind the front closet. This had to be designed around and clever solutions created in order to not only hide the electrical in the kitchen design, but to also limit the inconvenience to other unit owners in the building. Also buried in the closet was a sewer pipe that services other floors in the building. That could not be moved so more quick thinking was required. Another problem was the existing kitchen floor . With ceramic tile on a concrete subfloor, doing a thorough job in completely removing the tile, underlayment and any debris was critical to ensure that the new wood floor would be completely level and requiring no transitions between the living room and kitchen. This was not only a project challenge but also a critical need for the homeowner.



AFTER



BEFORE

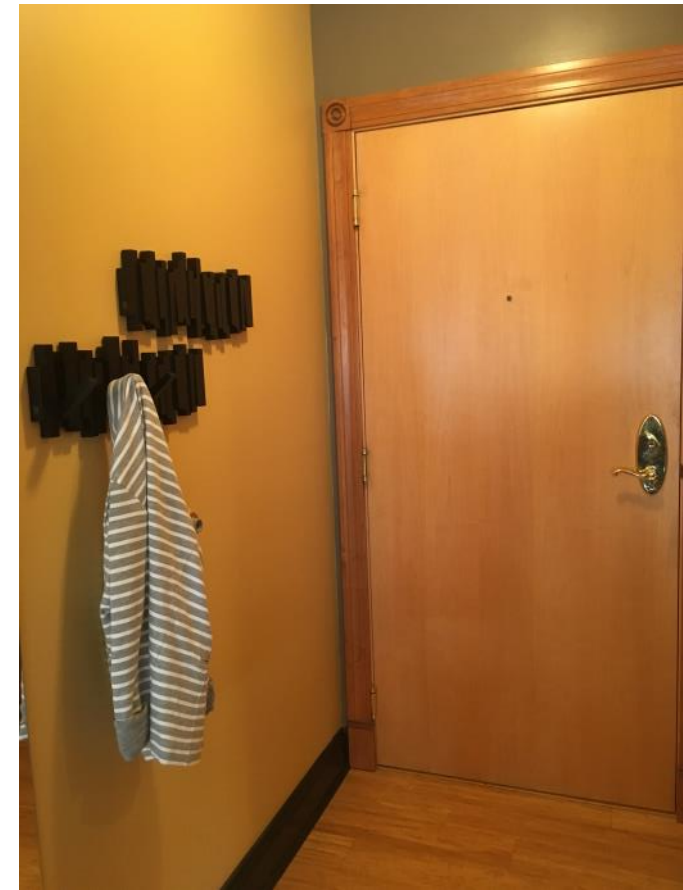
Project Obstacle 1 — The Solution A second entrance to the kitchen was created by eliminating the front closet as shown in the before photo. We were able to maintain the integrity of the electrical service connections by relocating some wires in a ceiling junction box and feeding wiring through the post and ledge at the end of the dining counter as shown in the after photo. A happy solution in order to give the homeowner the open kitchen she needed for accessibility. The old tile floor was replaced with a smooth Bamboo flooring that is not only low maintenance, but will provide obstacle free movement for the homeowner.



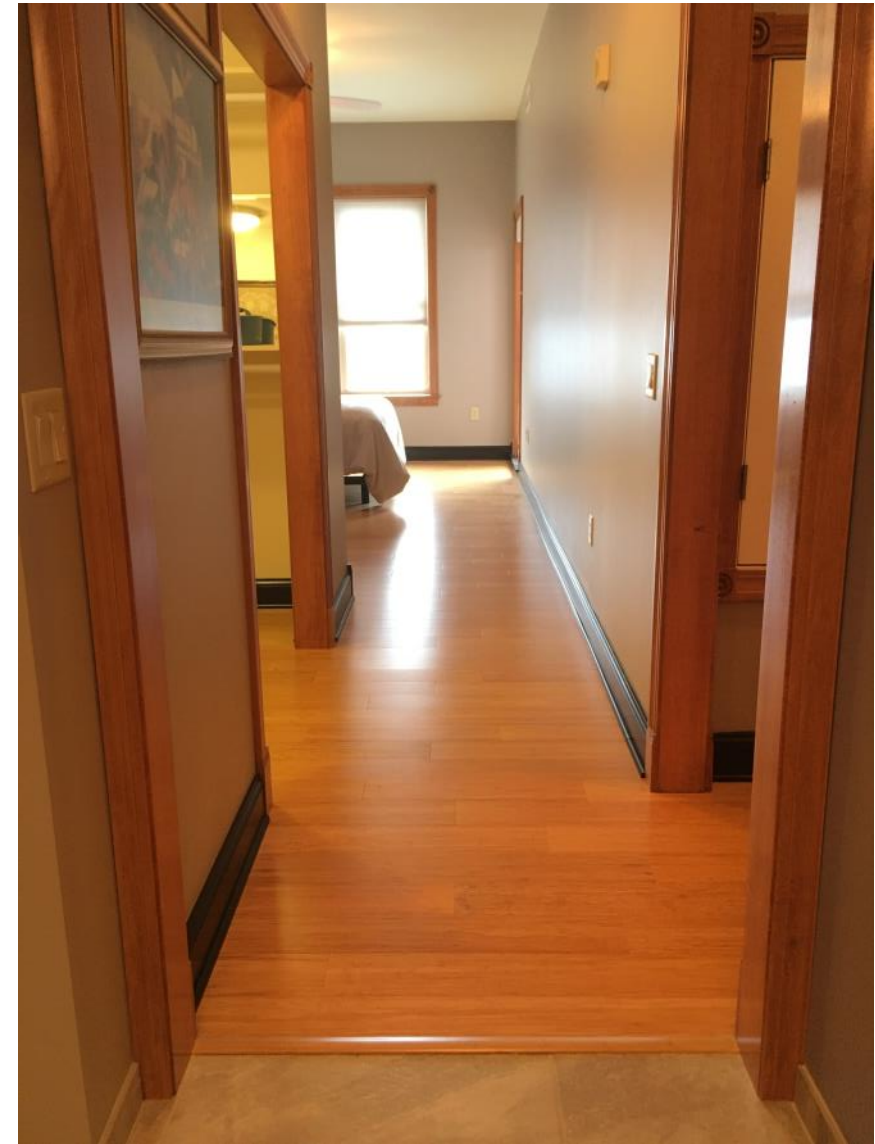
Project Obstacle 1— The Solution, continued The 8" sewer stand pipe for the other floors ran right through the planned pantry area. To keep the open kitchen floor plan, the custom pantry was modified. You will see in the photo on the right that the left side of the cabinet is slightly shallower than the right. This is the area where the stand pipes remain. Custom modifications were made to cabinets onsite so the building stand pipes remained undisturbed.



Project Obstacle 2 — Working around concrete structural post The original building plans were not accurate and did not reflect a 14"x14" concrete column hidden in the small hall pantry. In the original design, this pantry was slated to be removed to allow wider access to the kitchen from the living area. **Solution:** Since the pantry had to stay, we switched gears and gave it a Universal Design makeover by modifying it with sliding shelves. This gives the homeowner better access to storage. The island was re-designed to still give the kitchen a wider entrance. This modification to the original plans kept the space open even with the hall pantry in place. **9**



Universal Design Elements (L to R) — A pocket door replaced the doors to the master suite to create more room for moving between hall, bedroom and bath. The pocket door hardware was selected because it's chunky style makes it easy to grasp with little hand strength. Near the front door, multilevel, decorative art that doubles as a coat rack gives the homeowner a place to hang extra jackets when needed.



AFTER

Project Obstacles 3—Too many doors The master suite had four doors; from the hall, the bathroom, the walk in closet and the laundry. Too many doors to open and close in a small space when accessibility is key. **Solution:** To create the most space for moving between rooms, the master suite was re-designed with a single pocket door that separates the master suite from the hallway. This freed up space for wider entryways and more expansive area within these rooms. Another obstacle in this area involved the installation of the pocket door. In order to install the sliding door, a medicine cabinet in an adjacent bathroom had to be removed and an electrical service box protected (see lower left photo). The after photo (taken from the bathroom) shows the openness from room to room without the doors taking up valuable space.



AFTER

BEFORE



Homeowner Goal 2— Create an accessible master bath. The bathroom is now fully accessible. The old fiberglass tub is replaced with a roomy, roll in shower. The vanity is open allowing wheelchair access. Great use of storage with pull out drawers and easy to grasp handles. The shower floor is slightly different to provide visual contrast.



Project Obstacle 4 — Limitations with floor depth for roll in shower The new roll in shower base was 1 1/4" thick and there was no way to lower the pan into the floor to accommodate this thickness. **Solution:** The bathroom floor was installed to be one level. A slight ramp made the transition to the new hardwoods that are in the rest of the home. The gradual slope is the only major floor transition in the home and easily traversed by the homeowner's scooter. Grab bars and adjustable showerhead and controls round out the Universal Design features.



AFTER



BEFORE

Homeowner Goal 3—Create an accessible laundry room. Before, the laundry was in a closet in the bathroom and not accessible for homeowner. By redesigning the master bath and walk in closet, the laundry area was relocated making it a more user friendly, open space for the homeowner. The appliances were installed at a height that is appropriate for the homeowner's needs, making laundry a little bit less of a chore.



AFTER: The entire living space has great flow with the new hardwood floors and wide spaces in which to maneuver. A second room to the left will be used for any future in-home care providers. The homeowner is completely thrilled with the end result. She not only has a beautifully remodeled home, but it is finely tuned to her specific Universal Design needs. She has a beautiful space where she will be able to function safely today, but also confidently Age in Place.

