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AGING IN PLACE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF A FOREVER HOME

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What does it look like to craft a forever home—to build in lived experiences while planning for the years ahead?

According to 2007 U.S. census data, the average American is expected to move 11.7 times in his or her lifetime, prompted by changes in family structure, job relocation, downsizing, upsizing, perhaps even curiosity. We are a population well-versed in the reality of packing up one chapter while planning for the next, and initiate each move with distinctive goals and parameters, resulting in vast differences between the process of building a starter home and that of building a forever home.

In this blog we'll address the latter through the lens of a recent project, a 4,000 square-foot sanctuary in Boulder's Trailhead neighborhood crafted to simultaneously reflect lived experiences, foster current needs and anticipate the complexities of aging in place.



ABOUT THE CLIENT

The homeowner is a dynamic business executive who set her sights on returning to Boulder after decades of living away. While the move marks a step towards retirement, she continues to cultivate a lifestyle rich with thriving career, extensive travel, frequent guests, and a deep spiritual practice rooted in Pilates and meditation.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The project was backed by a highly-collaborative team of design professionals.

Architects: Steve Perce and Chris Gray of Bldg.collective and Rick Epstein of re:architecture

Interior designer: Sage Case of Studiotrope Design Collective

Feng shui specialist: Alex Stark Feng Shui

Landscape architect: Ransom Beegles of R Design Studios

PROJECT GOALS

"With this move, she wanted to reintegrate into the Boulder community—to anchor herself to a more casual and relaxed lifestyle that still allows her to perform her role as a high power business person and advisor to government officials." –

Alex Stark

"The homeowner wanted a quiet and contemplative experience in the dense urban context of the site."

– *Rick Epstein*

CENTRAL COURTYARD

"Having traveled all over the world, she came to love intimate courtyards like you might find in Italy, Mexico, or Morocco. This became the genesis of the design, which is centered around a private interior courtyard that flanks the main living area, with a large staircase connecting it and the upper patio. The sequence of indoor and outdoor spaces on the main floor and upper level creates a seamless flow of movement throughout the home." – *Steve Perce*

"The courtyard has four primary elements: a fireplace and lounge area, a large dining table, a sculptural staircase to the upper patio, and a water element that unifies them all. The space is designed to accommodate gatherings but intimate enough to enjoy alone. Metaphorically, we looked for ways to bring the sky into the courtyard, and selected timeless materials that will age well in the Colorado climate with careful grading to ease transitions and aid circulation/accessibility." – *Ransom Beegles*



CORNERSTONE: FENG SHUI

"With feng shui, I look at a space in terms of positive qualities—those that support the goals of the client—and negative qualities which can be neutralized or eliminated. We looked to the land to define the right position and proportion of elements, and planted a number of large quartz crystals in the perimeter of the foundation to harmonize the home and the land. The homeowner is a high-powered individual, so the home needed to support her dynamism and vitality, but also nurture, welcome family and friends, and fulfill her need for privacy." – *Alex Stark*

RHYTHM AND PRIVACY

"On the exterior, vertical grain wood siding and elongated charcoal brick are punctuated by a uniform pattern of windows. The effect is quiet, rhythmic, and sophisticated, and provides ample privacy from surrounding properties." – *Steve Perce*

"It doesn't beg for attention, but has a three-dimensional drama that makes it feel dynamic." – *Rick Epstein*

THE INDOOR/OUTDOOR CONNECTION

"There was a clear sense that outdoor spaces were of equal importance to indoor spaces. It was critical that the materials, level of refinement, and attention to detail match that of the interior. –Ransom Beegles

The whole wall on the main level erodes, so indoor and outdoor spaces needed to be tightly integrated." – *Sage Case*

CAPITALIZING ON MICROCLIMATES

Along the perimeter, we focused on native plants and xeriscaping. But the courtyard has a completely different microclimate, shaded and protected, so we were able to use plants you might find in the canopy of a forest. – *Ransom Beegles*

REFERENCING THE PAST

I went to visit her in her previous home to get a sense of how she functioned within the space. Though the new home is intentionally smaller, it needed to maintain the functionality that she had grown to expect. Together, we created an experience map—mentally walking through the home, and imagining how each space, each movement should feel—that served as our anchoring point for all decisions. – *Sage Case*



ZEN INTERIOR PALETTE

Inside, natural materials—plaster, wood, concrete, stone, metal—provide a zen experience and a neutral backdrop for her collection of artwork and souvenirs. – *Chris Gray*

MEETING SPACE

The main floor has more of a buttoned-up, professional quality than the other areas, and is designed to support home-based meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences and events. – *Rick Epstein*

The furniture and lighting needed to feel appropriate for business functions. We worked with Harrison Home Systems to design Lutron lighting scenes so she could easily adjust the mood based on the current moment. – *Sage Case*

NUTRITIONAL DISPLAY

In the client's words, we designed the kitchen as a 'nutritional display' used primarily for entertaining. We had a custom print commissioned for the area above the stovetop, went with understated appliances and minimal upper cabinetry, and tucked the functional pieces out of view, almost like a butler's pantry. The design relies on lower cabinets for storage, which will be easily accessible as she gets older." – *Sage Case*

NETFLIX NOOK

The upper level is her place to unwind, watch Netflix, and snuggle in. There's a family room with large, wrap around couches, connected to an outdoor patio with beautiful views and a shade cloth that can be pulled back in the winter months. – *Rick Epstein*

DUAL MASTER SUITES

We had a clear directive that there would be two master suites: one on the main floor and one on the upper level. This helped everyone on the team, from the GC to the tile setter, know that each space should be treated with the same level of precision and detailing. Both showers allow roll-in access. – *Sage Case*



LOWER LEVEL

The lower level includes a guest bedroom that will function as a caretaker suite if needed. We also created a Pilates studio, and installed a large window with lower level garden to pull natural light into the space. – Chris Gray
It was important that detailing in the lower level match that of other areas. It shouldn't feel like a basement or second-rate space, but like a place you want to spend time in. – Rick Epstein

NO FRONT ENTRANCE

There is no front door and no back door. Both entrances are of equal importance, and zigzag towards the central living areas, using artwork, plants, and materials to develop a narrative as you enter the home. The zigzag motion and emphasis on natural materials quiets any energy from the outside so it becomes nurtured and calm by the time it reaches the interior. – Alex Stark

ARTWORK AND FUTURE PROOFING

The two-story interior staircase is flanked by a custom, hammered-steel screen that stretches from basement to lofted ceiling. The home includes accommodations for a future elevator: a vertical shaft that now functions as a large coat closet on the main level, a powder room on the upper level, and storage space in the basement. – Steve Perce

WATER AND FIRE

In the courtyard, we placed the water and fire elements very close together, which is not classical in feng shui, and positioned these elements so they are visible from multiple areas of the home. – Alex Stark
From the second you walk through the front door, you pass a water element. That gets repeated as you walk through the house and onto the courtyard, where it is juxtaposed with the strong elements of the design. – Ransom Beegle