

An Eichler-inspired mid-century granny flat

By JANICE STEVENOR DALE



Multi-generational family households are making a comeback. Now homeowners are creating a second dwelling unit on their property called an Accessory Dwelling Unit or ADU.

In most residential properties, building code allows for it. Whether that unit is separate or not is explored through design.

This flexible space, sometimes referred to as a “mother-in-law” apartment, enables baby boomers to care for elderly parents while respecting their own independence, provide private quarters for adult children who return home, or can provide extra income through Airbnb or others. An ADU is often a completely separate structure, limited in square footage by the size of the existing house and its proportion to the lot. Alternatively, the approach is to create separate quarters within the existing structures. The level of connection is can be aligned to meet personal goals for privacy and independence.

My firm designed, and I developed, the Eichler Country Club Estates, an urban micro-development in the North End of Boise. There, we expanded the footprint of an original mid-century structure to develop shared housing for a group of active retirees.

We began by looking for land to build a retirement space where a few close friends and family members could live. With mid-century homes offering single-level living, we found a deteriorating but classic 1950’s structure with decent architectural bones and the right shaped plan on a large lot, an oversized ga-

rage and an in-ground pool. It made sense as the right beginning, with incredible rock and evergreen landscaping evoking Sun Valley. But the condition of the property was questionable: the original wood floors had been hastily stained black and there were five layers of flooring in the kitchen. After some demolition we discovered the original, rusted water heater had been permanently built in to the cabinetry.

The existing home was square in shape and the lot setbacks allowed for some expansion in the right areas. At the rear, we maximized space in the residence by adding a double master bedroom wing to create a courtyard-like enclosure adjacent to a large yard. The garage bounded one side, the double master bedroom the other. The yard is perfect for a pool, an evening sit around a firepit or a game of bocce ball. Across the courtyard near the kitchen, we added a built-in barbecue unit. Connecting the new studio and the double master bedroom, we extended existing sidewalks and poured a new concrete porch to the level of the house, which serves as an al fresco dining area under the bow of the original roof line.

Projecting out to the street from the front of the building was an office space that could serve as a bedroom with a closet. We divided and insulated the four-plus-car garage to accommodate another studio ADU with a kitchenette and plumbing for a future full bath. Each bedroom suite was planned with independent access from the exterior. View privacy from each space was carefully considered with window offset, and those to neighboring properties raised to a 66” sill height. Completing the view at the apex of the courtyard was a large galvanized sculpture.

The remainder of the garage development allowed for a two-car garage, and the

lot with swimming pool was split and sold, like the original property, in 2016. Our office created an architecturally sympathetic plan for another home to be built to accommodate the pool and utilize the 2-car tandem garage on that lot.

With five bedrooms in the primary house, all shared the family kitchen. Cooking chores were scheduled and shared. College dorm-sized refrigerators were incorporated into a bedside table in some of the private bedrooms. The studio had its own kitchenette with apartment-size refrigerator, microwave and hot plate. One stackable laundry facility behind closeted doors served the entire group, located in the main house. The doors assisted with acoustics as well as hiding the visual clutter.

We used low-cost, low-maintenance materials, such as corrugated galvanized aluminum, for the new exterior siding, a modern complement to the mid-century board and batten. We matched the classic low pitch roofline (2:1) of the 1950s home at the additions, allowing for rolled roofing rather than asphalt shingles. The low pitch allows for safer access by the owner, and the roofing materials a less expensive option over the life of the property. The roof pitch orientation will allow for the addition of solar panels in the future.

The shared housing concept is smart: it allows the users to pool their resources for housing, water, energy, utilities, Wi-Fi, transportation and consumables, while providing individual spatial and acoustical privacy. The location of the site near the urban core, made biking to local organic markets a real transportation option. With some of the friends owning cars, and not others, it promised reasonable expenses for all of us.

We addressed both visual and acoustical privacy con-

cerns by locating sliding doors with no opposing views and clustering bedrooms at different “ends” off the square public space, reducing noise. Visual privacy was accomplished with limited glazing and raised sill heights. Windows that looked out onto the street had higher sill heights. Even when viewing the sliding doors to the bedrooms and studio during the day from the public space, the reflection of light did not allow visibility into those private spaces. In the evening, window coverings blocked the narrow view of a small portion of the private spaces.

The use of the yard was shared and scheduled for weekend use to be respectful of people in the adjacent bedrooms.

This development was located near hiking trails and skiing runs, the latter, where public transportation is provided. We could all remain active but rely on public systems. This development was successfully completed in the near west area of Boise, noted as one of the most walkable and livable communities in the United States.

Capitalizing on the post WWII housing boom with its new freedom of open interior space and capturing the bold architectural form of the 1950’s housing, single level homes can be repurposed for extended family living that includes friends and/or family is a flexible solution that reflects smart design and planning, for the benefit of all. Rebecca Delphia with AARP has reviewed our project case study information and has invited us to speak about it at the AARP Livable Communities National Conference this fall.

Janice Stevenor Dale, FIIDA, CID, NCDIQ is President of J S D A Inc., an award-winning design firm in Boise, actively preserving landmark structures since 1987.