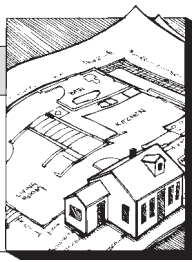


Opening an Entryway: A Case Study

by Gordon Tully



I was asked to redesign the kitchen wing of a Cape Cod-style house and to add an elevator for a disabled occupant. The plan hasn't yet been built, but it is a good example of how three simple design ideas — moving a wall back, changing a stairwell, and installing a skylight — can open up a cramped space.

The house is T-shaped, with the kitchen wing extending perpendicularly back from the main section. At the intersection is an entry hall, featuring a small U-shaped stair, two closets, and a half bath (see illustration). To the right is the dining room, to the left the living room with a chain of rooms beyond. Directly opposite the front door is a door to the kitchen area, beyond which is a laundry room and a garage. On the second floor, bedrooms and baths extend along all legs of the T.

The entry hall is the heart of the plan, because it links all the important rooms. Like entry halls in

most traditional plans, it is cramped and lacks natural light. The upstairs hall leading to the rooms over the kitchen does not have adequate headroom, and the stair, while elegantly detailed, is undersized, trapped between side walls. Moving furniture must be a nightmare.

The only logical place for the elevator is just beyond the entry hall, in what is now a butler's pantry. Making room for the elevator requires extending the front hall five feet to the rear, partially invading the kitchen wing. (This is not a problem, as the kitchen is being redone anyway.) The added space in front of the new elevator, which is tucked away to the side of the extended hall, makes room for a generous new L-shaped stair, with an open light well created by the crook of the L.

The key to the design is the large new skylight above the stair. As in many Cape Cod designs,

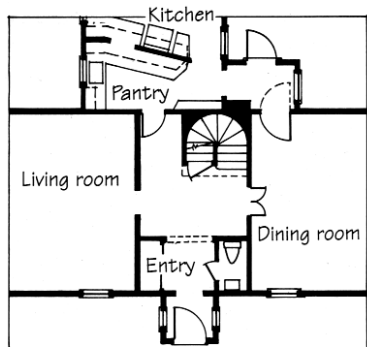
much of the upstairs space, including the stair, is under a shed dormer. Thus the skylight well is shallow, built into a shallow pitched roof. This makes it possible to flare the bottom of the well at a 45-degree angle without the flare intersecting the wall. Compared to a deep well with steeply sloping sides, this design brings in much more light.

What started as a utilitarian project — adding an elevator and redoing the outdated kitchen — turned into one that substantially improves the entry. While satisfying the client's basic requirements, I proposed to cure a fault (the cramped nature of the entry and stair) that is obvious to every visitor, but which the client has grown accustomed to.

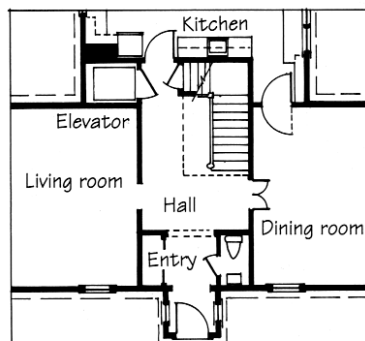
I've found that, once shown an unexpected opportunity such as this, most clients happily shift their priorities, cutting back on utilitarian options to free up money for space and light. Even if my client decides to keep the carefully crafted old stair for now, I hope to carry out the renovations in such a way as to allow the larger hall to be created later. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity. ■

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Existing First Floor



Proposed First Floor



The existing floor plan makes the entry the heart of the house, but leaves it crowded and dim. The author's proposed remodel opens up both the entry and stair while making room for the main practical requirement, a service elevator. This gives the entry and the second floor hall a much more open feel. The new skylight over the stairwell will increase this sense of openness and bring needed natural light into the entry.

Proposed First Floor Hallway



Proposed Second Floor Hallway

