

k + b studio

kitchen: body and soul

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Minneapolis architect Rosemary McMonigal has experience designing homes for people with special needs. An emphasis on “healthy living” is, after all, one of the tenets of her firm, McMonigal Architects. But the variety of concerns Minneapolis residents Barb and Hans Gasterland brought to her were downright daunting. They wanted something not too big (about 2,100 square feet of finished space on three levels) in the farmhouse vernacular (a nod to Barb’s rural Wisconsin roots) that could accommodate the couple’s 17-inch height

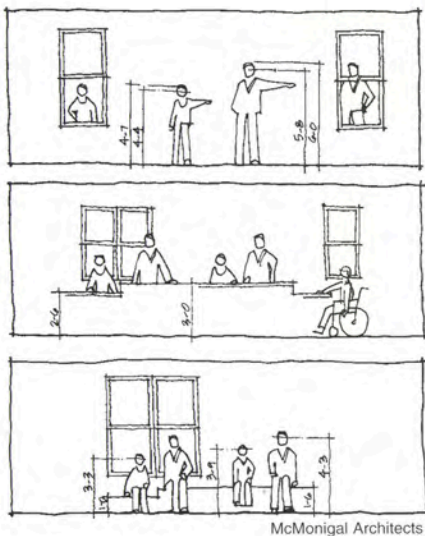
difference and Barb’s health issues. She uses a wheelchair periodically due to a degenerative joint disease and suffers from chemical sensitivities.

“Barb said her goal was to have a place to live that would ‘cheer, shelter, and give strength to body and soul,’” says McMonigal. “That was her No. 1 request.”

For nearly two years, every material spec’d for the house was tested to determine Barb’s reaction—among them the solid-

maple flooring used throughout the house, the laminate countertops, and the cabinets, which are maple veneer over formaldehyde-free composite panels.

Health concerns permeated every aspect of the home, but their greatest impact was in the kitchen. To start, the 12-foot-by-13-foot space was left open in the center to accommodate a wheelchair’s turning radius. Countertop heights were dictated by the couple’s particular kitchen roles. She’s more of the cook, so the stovetop and peninsula’s prep



Height and reach issues—from standing and sitting positions—influenced everything from window placement to counter size to built-in bench dimensions at the Gasterlands’ Minneapolis home.

areas are 30 inches high. He’s more of the dishwasher, so the sink’s countertop is 36 inches high. A set of steps pulls out from below the sink to give her standing access to that area, too. Should she move into a wheelchair full time, those under-sink cabinets are easy to remove.

Other accessible features in the kitchen include outlets, light switches, and appliance controls mounted on cabinet faces; an easy-to-reach appliance garage above the equally easy-to-reach oven; and roll-under space for a wheelchair at the peninsula, which faces the dining and living rooms.

Even something as straightforward as windows, positioned on opposite walls for cross-ventilation, were tricky given the couple’s height difference. “They really wanted double-hungs, but that was a challenge because of the horizontal divide,” says McMonigal. The windows had to be placed just right, she adds, so Barb could see out from below and Hans could look out from above.

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There's room in the light-filled kitchen and under the curved peninsula to accommodate Barb Gasterland's wheelchair when she needs it.

Photos: Andrea Rugg



architect: Rosemary McMonigal, AIA, McMonigal Architects, Minneapolis

builder: Luloff Inc., Minnetonka, Minn.

resources: bathroom plumbing fittings: American Standard, Delta, and Kohler; bathroom plumbing fixtures: Aquatic, Kohler, and Porcher; cooktop: Thermador; countertops: Nevamar and Wilsonart; kitchen plumbing fittings: American Standard; kitchen plumbing fixtures: Elkay; oven: KitchenAid; paints: Basic, Crystal Shield, Miller, and Zinsser; windows: Pella

