

# One Man's Green Serendipity

By Larry Cross

My home's inclusion in last year's (2012) annual City of Portland, OR "Build It Green! Home Tour" occurred for many reasons. My design focus resulted from very practical considerations: I require accessibility because of my walking disability. The six-year journey from buying a very tatty fixer in September 2006 to its present state as my own Shangri-La also resulted in some very personal life perceptions for myself.

I viewed many homes and none had any inkling of accessibility. I realized that this was my last chance at living short- and long-term in my own home and to no longer rent. I focused on what I needed in addition to what I wanted. Slowly, but very surely, my dramatic modifications paid off for not only myself, but for the greater community.

My home's inclusion in the house tour presented ideas about accessibility and universal design that are rarely available to the general public. I now design from a perspective of accessibility for everybody, and everybody. People's realization that they will age creates an awareness of how one's home may need modifications.

Ramps instead of stairs, plus pocket and sliding doors instead of swinging doors, added to the ease and my accessibility. I also created a much safer bathroom by including grab bars around the toilet and in the bathing space (bathtub, shower).

Safety does not mean a "hospital." My home presents no handicapped onus and the interior's openness minimizes my clutter. After creating a practical design, I realized that my changes were also philosophical.

My osteoporosis requires me to be very careful. Thus, I move more slowly to avoid falls. That's practical. But I realized it's also a reflection on how to change and improve my life. I now slow down and enjoy

things that I did not perceive before. Everything that I now own is mine because I want and need it, it works, and I use it. If it works, but I do not use it, I give it away. In removing unnecessary items from my house, I not only made a practical decision, but also a philosophical change, thus simplifying my life.

## Other Green Decisions

I bought chickens because their droppings produce the most powerful natural fertilizer. They also eat all my kitchen scraps; thus, I have no garbage pick-up. They also lay the best eggs that I've ever eaten and they also provide me with great satisfaction.

Rain now provides all the water for my outside plants. The practical benefit is a smaller water bill. But it also encourages a natural habitat that flourishes with the balance of nature. I love many aspects of adding years to my life, but I don't feel that I'm aging. I prefer "evolving in place."

## The Last Word

Returning to school (PCC-Sylvania) to earn a certificate in accessible and aging-in-place design has provided me with the opportunity to finally focus on my lifelong passion for architecture. I learned the buzz term for that: "encore career." I now hope to assist others in creating spaces that are accessible, but also include the necessary component of beautiful design.

My serendipity allows that to occur for me every day. As we all get older, our perceptions evolve. By being engaged in a passion, interacting with people, eating the best and freshest food possible, and incorporating physical activity (like walking), I can continue to grow and safely enjoy my life. I feel very lucky to realize many past mistakes that I am now attempting to compensate for by slowing down, appreciating much more, eliminating stress and anger, and expressing gratitude for what I have. ■

