

DAILY TIMES CALL

There's more to the story for people who have outgrown their homes but don't want to move

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LONGMONT — Patrick and Kerry Ott went through the roof. And so have many of their neighbors. For the Ottts, and numerous other westside residents who had grown attached to their homes and neighborhoods, the solution to a living-space squeeze was to move up, not out.

The Ottts bought their home near Third Avenue and Francis Street in 1992. The house, built in 1940, appealed to their aesthetic sense. “We’ve always been older house kind of people,” Kerry said. “Solid construction. Solid doors, instead of hollow core. Solid, we appreciate.”

The character of the old west-side neighborhood also charmed them. They liked walking their children to Central Elementary and they loved the school.

Patrick, a professional landscaper, treasures nearby Thompson park and its variety and wealth of trees. They like being able to walk to the Pantry Market if they want to, the mature landscape in their neighborhood and what Patrick calls the “small-town friendliness” of the people who live nearby.

But a few years ago, the Ottts faced a decision.

The birth of a second child and the needs of a growing family left them seeking more room than their one-story home provided.

“We tried looking at other homes, some new homes,” Kerry said. But new homes in new neighborhoods with massive garages dominating their architecture and spindly trees in the yard “never felt right to us,” she said.

In the end the decision came back to the neighborhood. “We wanted to stay in this neighborhood. We didn’t want to leave,” Kerry said.

They didn’t have to. For the Ottts, the next chapter was literally another story.

And Peter Modafferi was the author.

Modafferi runs **Modafferi Construction Inc.** out of his own old west-side home on Sherman Street. He can build a fine house from the ground up, but his true gift and passion is the second-story addition.

He said he works for people like the Ottts, people who “don’t want to be in the new neighborhoods.” Second-story additions dot the old west side and the bulk of them are the work of Modafferi.

He shares much with the people for whom he works. He chose his own home in 1981 because of the “ambiance of the older neighborhood, the mature landscape and Central Elementary. I really liked that school.” And like many of his clients he believes “new housing is too monotonous.”

He grew up in New Jersey, did a stint in the Air Force including duty in Vietnam and then moved to Colorado in 1973.

He worked as a framing contractor after his arrival and got a taste of remodeling work in the late ’70s when he helped to build some condominium projects in Boulder that tied into existing, older homes. He liked it.

“I enjoy the challenge of it. It gets maddening, but I think I’ve learned most of the lessons

you can learn,” he said.

He estimated he’s done 50 major remodeling projects in the area, many of them second-story additions, but also many main level additions.

“I remember them all. Six Forty-Two Pratt was one of the first ones. I got a lot of learning off of that one,” he recalled with a smile. But the homeowners liked his work and he later did another project for them.

The projects are challenging not only for Modafferi, but also for the homeowners, who usually continue to live down below while Modafferi, his crew and his various subcontractors toil upstairs.

A typical project requires three to four months. Modafferi works hard to minimize the hardship on occupants, but a second-story addition usually involves plumbers, electricians, roofers, engineers, architects, concrete workers and building inspectors as well as the carpenters.

Patrick Ott recalled it was like having relatives drop in for a four-month stay, “constantly having someone here. Seven in the morning until 7 at night.”

Modafferi is on hand from beginning to end, overseeing every stage of the project from tearing the original roof off to installing the final switchplate in a new master bedroom.

Removing the original roof and doing the other demolition necessary to get the project off the ground is one of Modafferi’s least favorite parts of the job, but, surprisingly, it’s a phase that generates few protests.

“It’s loud, it’s dirty. You would think homeowners wouldn’t like it, but it’s the beginning of the project. They’re kind of excited about it. It’s new,” he said.

For people attached to their neighborhoods and their older homes, a second story is almost always an option, he said.

While many people doubt their current house can support another level, Modafferi said, “old foundations are really good, usually. Contractors in the ’20s, ’30s and ’40s knew what they were doing.”

Even in houses that have foundations that will not support a second story, Modafferi said new posts and beams can be deployed through the existing framework to “carry the whole second story. It’s always solvable. You can always make it work.”

On every project, maintaining the neighborhood character and architectural integrity of the original home is a priority.

In the Otts’ case, the second story was designed in Frank Lloyd Wright’s “prairie style” with a wide low roof and windows that turned corners.

The new story blends flawlessly into the original home and visually blends effortlessly into the neighborhood.

That’s the goal, Modafferi said, and one that’s been made easier by a building supply market that has kept pace with a growing demand for restoration materials.

Modafferi said he can now acquire with relative ease almost any material or piece he needs for a project including “lap siding, period fixtures for plumbing, lighting, doors and hardware.”

His average project is 700 to 1,000 square feet of new living space and typically includes a master bedroom, master bath and walk-in closet space.

“Basic ballpark is \$130 to \$150 a square foot,” Modafferi said. Many homeowners who have lived in their houses for several years have sufficient equity to finance a second-story project.

Modafferi said the payback is not immediate, but the new space instantly adds value to

the home and the passage of time will in all likelihood bring continued price appreciation for the property.

The Otts agree. They are confident they will recoup their investment, but Patrick also advised anyone considering such a project “to make sure you’re going to stay for a few years.” The advice is, in part, to ensure that all the plaster dust, noise and inconvenience endured during the project was worthwhile, but also to allow the home’s value to appreciate in Boulder County’s robust real estate market.

Patrick’s other advice: “Know what you want, make a wish list and interview a lot of contractors.”

The Otts are glad they chose Modafferi. “He’s as professional as they come,” Patrick said. “If he said he was going to do it, he did it.”

And sometimes more.

True to Murphy’s Law, the Otts’ project got off to a foreboding start. “No sooner had they taken the roof off, when it started to rain,” Patrick recalled. And rain. And rain.

“Pete went up on the roof at 3 a.m. one morning to drain the tarps because we had so much rain and he was afraid they would collapse,” Patrick said.

He said he awoke to the wee-hour noise, nudged Kerry and asked her if there was someone on their roof. “She said, ‘Nah, not at this hour.’”