

Take steps to add style to your house

BY DIANE GALE
SPECIAL WRITER

Staircases are more than a means to get from one story to another.

If you've seen it once you'll never forget Rhett holding Scarlett and ascending a long flight of steps. Staircases have long represented mystery and romance in art, too, with angels leaning gently against a succession of steps leading to heaven.

In our own homes our imaginations set the limit to what we can have, according to Mike Borland, Woodsmiths Design and Manufacturing territorial sales manager for Michigan, Chicago and Wisconsin.

Browsers at the Fall Remodeling Show in Novi Thursday-Sunday will get a taste of what Borland has to offer in his library of brochures and pictures.

"Homeowners have options within options that they're not aware of and it's one of the best-kept secrets," said Borland, who works out of his Redford Township house that he shares with his wife, Wendy.

Borland will show visitors a mockup of a staircase with wooden newels designed after pineapples and cats. And he will remind them that Woodsmiths' craftspeople, including a master woodcarver from Italy, can bring to life almost anything they can dream up.

Staircases are usually the first thing we see after entering the front door. They can be circular, spiral, straight and made of almost any material, including wood, metal, glass and many types of stone. The cost ranges from \$6,000 to more than \$40,000.

The most expensive staircase Borland could recall working on was a three-story, all-glass staircase that was wired for electricity so it could light up. It was built in a home in northern California and the cost was \$43,000.

"The staircase is the biggest piece of furniture in the home, but it's permanent."

Trends seem to be going toward charcoal gray, European-type, wrought-iron, circular staircases and carved wooden

newels. The most common wood used is still oak, with cherry and maple following. But any kind of wood can be used, Borland said.

"We sold more spirals during the first six months of this year than during the last two years."

The succession of steps creates that uplifting, you-can-do-anything feeling. So, a lot of homeowners let their staircases, oftentimes the focal point of the interior design, become a reflection of their personal flair and style.

An unusual but brilliant request, Borland said, came from a woman who wanted to change the look of her staircase on a regular basis. Woodcarvers grooved out a place within each step for inserts. She ordered six sets of different colored inserts that she changes for the season, the holiday and whether she is having company.

Woodsmiths, a division of the 60-year-old L.J. Smith Company, sells directly to homeowners and builders.

If a homeowner is interested in doing something different from what the builder is offering, he or she can bring Woodsmiths in for ideas. Borland works directly with architects on designs and ideas.

Borland previously worked as a furniture designer. He designed all the furniture, from headboards and chairs to dressers, in the Bavarian Inn Motor Lodge in Frankenmuth.

You don't have to be a new homeowner to have a new staircase. People who want something different can usually change their existing staircases. A straight staircase that turns 90 degrees, for instance, can be transformed into a circular staircase.

What you put into your staircase financially could become a good investment, too.

"We've done studies with builders across the country who had models with straight staircases and models with circular staircases. Above the cost of the staircase, the circular style enhances the value of the house up to 50 percent above the cost of the staircase."

Steps to style:
Many homeowners let staircases become reflections of their personal flair and style.



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