

## Empty nesters' full house

**The Rollers made sure that their post-children home would have everything they wanted.**

By Diane M. Fiske  
For The Inquirer

Joan and Jerry Roller take turns explaining their love for their new home on Fitzwater Street.

"This one is for us - a grown-up house," Joan Roller said.

"Our first house was a kid house . . . filled with kids' toys and kids' books," Jerry Roller said. "Now, our son and daughter are married, and we wanted something for ourselves."

Much as they love their children, the Rollers said, when they moved out it was time to leave behind the house that had libraries for the adults and the children, places for teens to hang out, and mounds of bicycles and sports equipment.

But where to go in the city after leaving that three-story house near Rittenhouse Square?

"It took us five years to find this 40-year-old house, which was part of an estate. It needed a lot of work," Joan said.

"Well, it was tired," added her husband.

Joan, who is a lawyer, left the design of the new house to her architect husband. But first, they agreed on a list of the problems with their old house and a wish list for solving them in their new one.

"We have been married 41 years," she said. "We have very similar tastes."

Over the course of four years, they gave the new house a new identity without sacrificing its original good planning - for example, the fact that the building occupies two lots, with a third lot that accommodates a huge garden.

Nor did their changes make the house look out of place amid the small buildings on this narrow stretch of Fitzwater Street, originally an 18th-century carriage path. ▼



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“We added a greenhouse where a small swimming pool had been and a two-story addition with a garage on the first floor and space for a master bedroom on the second,” Jerry said. (Yes, there are two guest rooms for their children and friends.)

A two-story great room was created by removing the floor between the first and second levels. The kitchen, dining, and living areas now flow into one another, in a space that once had been three small rooms.

One enters the house to a view of a sparkling black-tile floor that sweeps past the kitchen and dining areas, down three steps to the living area, and out to the greenhouse.

One problem with their former home: “We love to entertain family and friends, and we didn’t have enough space to invite as many people as we wanted to,” Jerry said.

Problem solved! The greenhouse can accommodate an overflow of guests from the living area.

“We don’t have to worry about how many people to invite and whether they will step over one another,” Joan said. “We have had 65 people in here.”

The open kitchen solved another problem: In the old house, there was never enough room for two cooks. And both Rollers like to cook: “I like to braise anything, and he makes pies,” she said.

Now, because of dine/work space at their island - made of Swiss pear wood, with a cooking area in the middle - the couple can prepare meals side by side, and guests can sit and talk with their hosts.

The kitchen is done in earth tones, with brown granite countertop and sink - more inviting than traditional white or stainless steel.

A 20-by-14-foot dining area with a glass table and red chairs opens off the kitchen, inviting guest participation in any meal being served.

The living area features a small gas fireplace installed in a column, to contrast with the glass-pane greenhouse wall.

A twisting staircase with cast-iron railings divides the great room from the addition, which includes the new second-floor master suite.

The new bedroom suite is designed to minimize noise. A dressing room leads from the adjacent bathroom, with access to the hall “so I can leave for work if my wife is asleep without disturbing her,” Jerry said.

A small glassed-in balcony juts out from the corner of the bedroom and overlooks the garden below.

Want a quiet place? A library filled with books offers comfortable chairs for reading, watching television, or just gazing through the bay windows at the greenhouse’s indoor garden.

An apricot tree and a field of impatiens filled the outdoor garden on a mid-September day. Comfortable seats are everywhere.

Joan said that when her mother visited, she could not get over how quiet it was in this corner of Philadelphia.

“She couldn’t hear any of the sounds of the city,” Joan said. “It is just like being out in the country.”

