

# A Fresh Start

The surprising rewards of downsizing

By BETSY RILEY

Designer Beverly Baribault helped her clients locate a ranch house where everything would be on one level.



A flat trail leads from the Everses' new home to their former residence, where their son's family now lives.



Beverly was able to re-purpose many pieces, such as rugs and the sofa, from the owners' previous residences.

Whether you call it downsizing, rightsizing, aging-in-place, or just retiring, more Baby Boomers are creating homes that will make life easier in future years.

"What we're seeing is people making a conscious decision before it's too late to get their stuff in order," says designer Beverly Baribault. "It's the difference between having to do it and choosing to do it." Increasingly, accessibility has become part of the conversation at many stages of life. Architectural and interior designer Mark Williams says even a young family with whom



Beverly installed Tech Lighting in upper cabinets to make objects easier to see. "White light is better for aging eyes than yellow," notes Beverly. Pendants over the island are also by Tech Lighting.



**"The idea of letting go is very emotional and hard. But once they get there, it's actually invigorating."** —BEVERLY BARIBAULT

he is working wants to incorporate multigenerational features into their "forever home" in case the grandparents move in someday.

To create a senior-friendly environment, getting professional help early is critical. Accommo-

dations like wider doorways for wheelchairs, zero-entry showers, and easy-to-reach storage are best incorporated during construction. Also, installing fixtures like grab bars early on allows them to coordinate with other hardware—whereas retro-

fitting spaces later can start to look institutional.

One of the biggest challenges for scaling back, of course, is sorting through a lifetime of possessions. "The hardest part that these families go through is that their kids don't want any-

thing," says Beverly. "The idea of letting go is very emotional and hard. But once they get there, it's actually invigorating. They start having fun. In the end, that sofa was really never that comfortable. All kinds of reminiscent conversations come out. If you do it right, it's a slow process. If the designer takes the time and allows clients to go through the emotional steps of letting go, it really turns out to be exciting and fun."

**"In the big house, Connie's things were always competing with the incredible architecture."**

—BEVERLY BARIBAULT

"We're trained to think that we need more space than we actually do," says Mark. "Once we have that space, we work very hard to fill it up. Thinning out stuff becomes very emotional. The process can be difficult, but the results can be exciting."

A prime example is a home that Beverly designed for longtime clients Don and Connie Evans. Although the couple had retired to Charleston less than two years earlier, they returned to Cartersville, where they'd lived for 50 years, after Don was diagnosed with macular degeneration. Working with Beverly, they located a ranch house on one level with an easy walking path to their former address—a 19th-century English-style manor, where their son's family now lives.

With help from architect Eric Rothman, Beverly remodeled the entire structure and added a back porch and a new garage. Gutting the interior made it easier to specify conveniences like extra distance between the kitchen island and counters (five feet versus the standard four), lighting inside upper



Beverly designed and patented the unique crisscross handle on the sliding door.

cabinets, and wide hallways. The master bathroom has a curbless shower and brass grab bars that coordinate with other finishes.

Beverly helped the Evanses edit their furnishings to the things that had the most meaning. "We tried very hard to use everything they wanted to keep. Ironically, this is probably the best their personal possessions

have ever looked," says Beverly. "In the big house, Connie's things were always competing with the incredible architecture of the home."

Likewise, Mark, assisted by Shanna Springfield, worked with Jerry Cohen and Andrea Strickland to complete their new home in a row of single-family residences attached to Peachtree Hills

Place in Buckhead. The location provided the best of both worlds—proximity to longtime friends and a new custom house. "Their former home was beautifully situated on a gorgeous, wooded ridge, but it was a little isolated," says Mark. "For this stage of their lives, when they were less committed to professional endeavors, they wanted to be closer to their friends."