

Current mortgage rates, 15- and 30-year fixed, conforming

D.C. **2.93** **3.56** Md. **2.94** **3.54** Va. **2.88** **3.51**

SOURCE: BANKRATE.COM

## Two old condos become one entertainment showplace

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett  
Special to The Washington Examiner

Five years ago, empty nesters Rick and Elsa Stoner moved from their single-family home in McLean to a two-bedroom high-rise condo in Tysons Corner.

They loved the convenience but longed for more space. So they purchased the condo next door. Then they hired AV Architects + Builders, who combined the condos to create a Manhattan-style penthouse.

"The biggest challenge was how to design it so that it didn't feel like there was two of everything," said Francisca Alonso, managing principal for AV Architects + Builders. "Because there was — two of everything."

An active couple, the Stoners travel frequently. They recently returned from the Summer Olympics in London. They enjoy having extra space to host friends, their three adult children and a grandson.

Until moving into the condo, they had always owned a single-family home. They were so apprehensive about their lifestyle change that they kept the single-family house just in case they changed their minds.

"We are not apartment dwellers, so we had to make sure we could live in a condo" said Elsa Stoner. "So we tried it with the two-bedroom to see if we liked the community or the restrictions you sometimes have."

After two-plus years, they decided the pluses, including being able to "lock up and leave," outweighed the minuses.

The high-rise, built in the late 1970s, was a typical no-frills unit with low ceilings, soffits and boxy



Rick and Elsa Stoner wanted more space in their McLean high-rise condo, so they bought the condo next door. The couple hired AV Architects + Builders to combine the two spaces to create a Manhattan-style penthouse.

rooms. The corner condo was the larger of the two, but "you basically came in and you had a wall in front of you and a wall to your right. So you were forced to go to the left," Alonso said. "You had to enter every room to experience each room because they were all divided by walls. It made the space look smaller and less conducive to entertaining."

The smaller condo had a better floor plan, but its kitchen had no window, so they decided to make the other kitchen the focal point.

"The decision was easy, because the other kitchen had a main window in the core of the larger condo," Alonso said. "Out of that grew the entire floor plan."

The new space is divided into public and private areas. Public

areas include the new, open kitchen, a breakfast area, a large dining room, a powder room and two guest rooms, one with two full-size beds and a private bath, set up like a hotel suite.

This allows guests to have their private area too. "They can come to visit, but they are not on top of you," Elsa Stoner said.

The private area includes a media room, den, the smaller kitchen, the master bedroom and a private entrance that used to be the entrance to the second condo.

When the Stoners throw parties, they use the private kitchen to prepare the food, and the larger one remains clean.

Cherry wood cabinets with a suede finish on full overlay doors were used in the kitchen, eating



COURTESY JEANETTE GALIE BURKLE WITH GALIE PHOTOGRAPHY

area and private den. In the kitchen, granite counters in shivakashi gold complement the warm golden wood floors and amber-toned glass backsplash.

The Stoners chose a cherry finish to go with the dining room table, a Stoner family heirloom. The table seats 12 and, unlike in the old space, can be used with the leaves extended.

Recessed lights were installed beneath soffits throughout the condo so the Stoners could showcase their extensive art collection, much of it from Elsa Stoner's native Ethiopia.

"When we first moved in, he kept calling it our hotel, because that's what it felt like," Elsa Stoner said of her husband. "Now he's starting to call it home."

### UNIVERSAL DESIGN

## Bathrooms that are elegant and accessible

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett  
Special to The Washington Examiner

The goal of so-called universal design is to create buildings, spaces and products that are accessible to people with or without disabilities, but it can be difficult to find universal design items that fit into interior design styles.

People of all ages also may be reluctant to incorporate universal design elements in bathroom remodeling projects, fearing they could make the space too specific, said Laurie Crum, a designer with Summit Design Remodeling. "Universal design doesn't have to look like a public bathroom," said Crum, who advises clients on using these elements. She said fixtures come in styles that make them as attractive as anything else in the bath. She said jaclo.com offers fixtures in 21 finishes to match any style.



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