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Colonial-style stairway follows gracefully curved walls in the Sarasota home of Dr. and Mrs. Steven Newman. ↑ TH13

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERLY PETERSON



This Brass-trimmed stairway in the Bradenton home of Mr. and Mrs. Dan McClure was built during the early 20th century.

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Multi-Story Homes Have Their Ups and Downs

By MARY ALICE COLLINS
Correspondent

Stairs are a necessary configuration within multilevel homes. Fortunately, necessary does not have to mean nondescript.

Gary Roberts of Bamboo Building and Development in Sarasota designs stairs that get stares. It simply isn't enough to utilize stairs as a way to link levels, he says. Stairs should not be architectural afterthoughts, but an element central to the design of the overall floor plan. To Roberts, this means stairs that are custom-built for each home.

"Many home buyers and home builders are not aware that the majority of stairs are pre-fabricated," Roberts explained. "Huge out-of-state stair factories turn out hundreds of these stairs, sized to required specifications. They are shipped in one piece and the builder just bolts them into place."

Roberts, on the other hand, wants his staircase designs to vary dramatically from home to home. His stairs sweep around corners and ascend from fantastic foyers like tiny terraced hillside. It required two months of labor to carry out his concept for stairs in the Siesta Key home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Long.

"The design was difficult to build, due to the compound angle," said Roberts. "The stair curves horizontally in a semicircle at the same time it moves upward. The stairs are also free-floating. They are connected only at the top and the bottom, with no support in between."

Construction involved laminating plywood together — one sheet at a time — until a thickness of four inches was achieved. Each layer had to dry completely before the next could be added. The sheets were clamped together, cut to shape, filled in and finished. Stair treads had to be sized according to two different dimensions: the outside and inside stringers (tread supports). The inside stringer was much narrower due to the stair's curved design.

"When it came to connecting the stringer to the red oak rail, we had planned to use circular dowels or spindles," explained Roberts. "These dowels were to be drilled and fitted into the stringer and the railing. But the dowels were approximately as wide as the railing so it became necessary to utilize smaller dowels, almost pegs, to affix each larger dowel individually." Roberts opted for an open-tread, no-riser stairway



Suspended stairway in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Long is supported only at the top and bottom. ↑ TH13

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and wrapped each individual tread in carpeting. The finished stairway gives the illusion of suspension and the graceful, airy lines adapt ideally to the soft pastels and open floor plan of the Long home. The stairs blend with the floor plan while transcending more functional steps. That, says Roberts, is successful design.

Another stairway was created with a similar curved design. ↑ TH13

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Stairways Give Multi-Story Homes Their Ups and Downs

Continued from 1D

design for a much different home," said Roberts. "Dr. and Mrs. Steven Newman wanted a traditional home; a home almost colonial in feeling. The challenge was very different and yielded an interesting piece of work."

Here, Roberts fashioned a stairway shunning right angles. The first five treads of the stair extend into the living room while the bal-

ance of the stairway is contained within the foyer. Such gentle curves are in harmony with semi-circular walls directly below and behind the stairs.

"All of the crescent shapes — even the opening between the two floors is a crescent — called for a soft stair," Roberts said. The slope is gentle, the curve subtle. China blue carpeting covers each step except the lowest one, done in oak to blend with the wood flooring. The rail is

also done in oak and finished in a "newel post with a graceful curlicue design."

"We even put an arched niche in the curved wall behind the stair, a space for decorative art," said Roberts. "It is a small detail, but an important one. For this is the essence of custom home building — working completely from an original design."

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