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Raising the roof on Weston Home



STAFF PHOTO BY KEN MCGAGH

David Morgan of Southborough in front of the Weston home he is remodeling.

By Greg Turner
NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

David Morgan is used to heavy lifting. The Southborough resident not only has 30 years of construction experience, his latest remodeling project has him raising the ceilings of a house in Weston by 24 inches.

The owners, Richard and Kathy Silverman, wanted higher ceilings for reasons both practical and

economical. Richard Silverman is 6-feet, 3-inches tall, a mere foot beneath their home's 7-foot, 3-inch ceilings.

Atlanta native Kathy Silverman grew up in a house in Georgia that had 14-foot-high ceilings, and she knows the extra space will add value to their home.

It's not a common project but one Morgan and his crew of five builders are capable of handling.

"It wasn't that difficult at all,"

boasted Sherwood Marshall, lead carpenter and Billerica resident. "There's not much you can't do to a house. You just have to make it structurally sound when it's up."

The Silvermans heard about Morgan's company, D.R.M. Design Build Inc., from a neighbor, and originally planned only a modest remodeling project.

"At some point along the way, I said to David, 'These ceilings always bothered me. Can you do

something about them?' He went away and brooded about it, then came back and said, 'I've found out a way to do it,' " Kathy Silverman said.

Morgan and his crew took it one floor at a time, working from one half of the house to the other, first lifting the second-floor ceiling – the roof line – by 9 inches, then raising the first-floor ceiling by 15 inches. At the same time, they DESIGN, see next page

Contractor remakes Weston home

DESIGN, from previous page

knocked back the Garrison Colonial home's overhanging second-floor facade and created a flat-faced Colonial – “to make it more distinctive,” Morgan said.

The Silvermans moved out in early May, two months into the 10-month project. They hope to return to their “new” home in December. “We’re getting the feeling of a whole new house but we’re staying on the property,” Silverman said.

As of this week, the 1969 house stands gutted and sawdusty, the stairs inside not quite meeting the second-floor landing, the fireplace falling short of the ceiling. But the new design is steadily taking shape under the watchful eyes of Morgan.

His company takes its name from its niche. He designs all his remodeling projects, with the assistance of computer design software, then sees them through the building process. He works closely with homeowners on kitchen makeovers, backyard decks and historic restorations. Though not unique, this type of contractor is gaining popularity because it cuts out what some consider the hassle of a third wheel: the architect.

During the expensive, often emotional renovation of a house, conflicts can arise over the design, the changes, the cost increases, the finished product.

“It turns into a blame game. The architect will blame the builder and the builder will blame the architect,” said Morgan, 50. “You’ve got a lot more attention and focus from one person.”

The homeowner benefits under the design-build system, he said, by saving money and having a straight line of communication to a single person. Morgan can design a project to fit the client's budget and closely monitor progress to make sure it stays within that budget.

The Silvermans' project will cost more than \$500,000 and includes a new roof, windows, gutters, exterior and interior finishes. So far they are satisfied with

their contractor and his way of doing business.

“I think it's a faster process, by not having a third person involved in it. There's a lot of times where you come to a situation where you need to make a decision, and if you have an architect it could take weeks,” Silverman said. “We don't lose any time.”

Morgan acknowledges that under his system everything is placed squarely on his shoulders, that he's the one breaking the news about any cost increases – but that's how he prefers to work.

“He's there once or twice a day,” Silverman said. “I keep a lot of notebooks on the way I want

less risky – than putting money in the volatile stock market right now.

He also believes many people with homes are “nesting more,” spending time around the house rather than taking faraway vacations – fallout from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

“I think they're more focused on the home,” he said. “They're spending more time at home and they want it nicer. So they're investing in it.”

Morgan also specializes in fixing up historic homes, whether remodeling a kitchen or building a guest-room addition. The key, he said, is to carefully blend old

He was judged on his relationships with customers, professionalism, and community contributions.

Morgan helped restart the wheelchair ramp building program sponsored by the Eastern Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Lumber yards donate materials and remodelers their expertise to build ramps for people who can't afford them.

Morgan's company also won the award for “Best Deck Over \$20,000” last month. He designed a curved deck attached to the rear of a Weston home.

“The house was a bunch of mismatched additions and really weird angles,” Morgan said. “So I did the deck to take your eyes away from that. It gave it a much different look.”

A certified remodeler, Morgan studied architectural history at Dartmouth College and took courses at the Boston Architectural Center. He spent many years working for a general contractor on Martha's Vineyard, then started his own business in the mid-1990s. The Wayland native lives in Southborough with his wife, Sandra, and has three children.

Morgan's grandfather was a cabinetmaker, “so I grew up with the tools,” he said, and his maternal grandfather built homes in Weston in the 1920s and '30s, so he sometimes wonders if he is working on the same houses.

Morgan relishes the relationships he develops with homeowners, some of whom have become close, almost like family.

“We get really enduring relationships and make friends with some of our clients,” he said. “It's a really powerful thing because they know we listen to them and use their ideas. It's a team thing.”

And, unlike a job where the finished product goes off to the customer, never to be seen again by its maker, Morgan said he has the advantage of following through on his project.

“We get to see immediately whether they like it or don't.”

PROFILE

D.R.M. DESIGN BUILD INC.

Owner: David Morgan

Number of employees: 7

Revenue: Undisclosed

Industry: Residential remodeling

Company background: Morgan works remodeling projects from the design to building stages, crafting everything from backyard decks to additions on historic homes.

things to look in the house, and I'm able to show David that. David's able to execute exactly what we want.”

D.R.M. Design Build specializes in “high-end” remodeling projects in well-to-do towns such as Wayland, Wellesley, Weston, Sherborn and Concord, for “people who can afford the kind of work we like to do,” Morgan said.

Customers come from word-of-mouth advertising; Morgan stopped buying ads more than two years ago. He has projects booked through the next year and a half. “I'm busier than I've ever been,” he said.

Morgan said the remodeling industry is booming, in part because investing in a home may be more advantageous – or at least

with new.

Morgan won a regional remodeling award for his work on the Poor House in Weston, a farmhouse built in the early 1700s. He incorporates Shaker cabinets into the modern kitchen and installed wide, hand-hewn beams brought in from Maine to accent the living-room ceiling.

“That's the problem with historic restorations: People want modern amenities,” Morgan said, noting he took the shine off the surface of the granite-topped island in the kitchen.

Last month, Morgan was named “Massachusetts Remodeler of the Year” in a ceremony sponsored by Design/Build Business magazine and several national construction companies.