



# Full Access

A RANCH IS REDESIGNED TO CREATE MORE OPEN SPACE, OUTSIDE ACCESS, AND UNIVERSAL APPEAL.

**T**wo things sold Michael McConnell on the angular one-story home he found in California's picturesque Santa Ynez Valley. First, he loved the 360-degree view of the surrounding countryside. But even more appealing than the view was the fact that the previous owner used a wheelchair, too. Many of the changes Michael would have made to make the house enjoyable and accessible—such as grading one side of the pool to allow easy transfer from wheelchair to water—had already been done.

After living in the house for a few years, however, Michael realized there were some things about it that he wanted to change. At the top of his list was the desire to shift the home's orientation away from the pool area and out toward the view. He also wanted to make aesthetic changes, such as getting rid of glass block and carpet. In addition, he wanted to make the house more

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ABOVE LEFT: Wide paths were created throughout the garden, allowing Michael McConnell to get into it rather than just viewing it from the perimeter.  
ABOVE: To let in light as well as the view, double door replaced a single, solid front door.

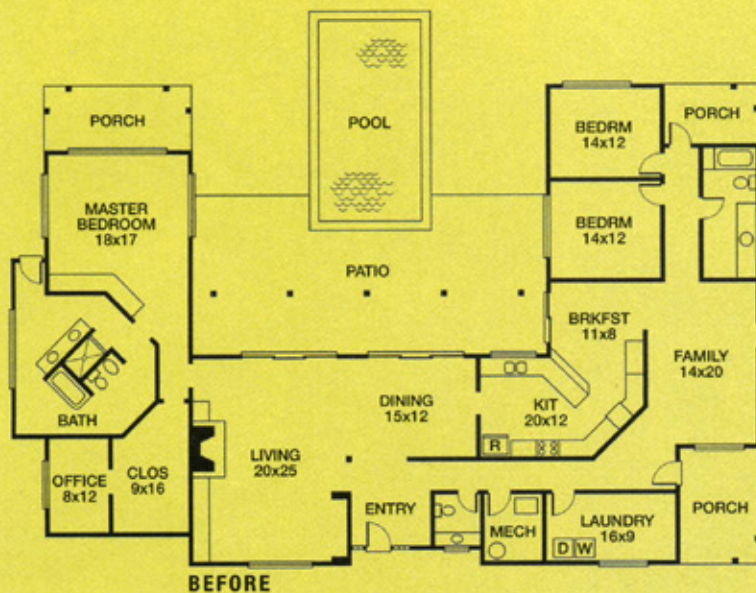




ABOVE: Black diagonal-shape bookshelves give Michael space to display his collection of vintage memorabilia.

user-friendly, not just for him, but for family and guests, too. "All through college, I rented and had to adapt and make do with what was there," Michael says. "I saw this as my chance to make my home suit me. No more taking doors I couldn't get through off the hinges or dealing with a kitchen or bathroom that didn't work for me."

Michael hired Santa Barbara designer-builder Emilio Casanueva for the project and found him to be perfect for the job. "I wanted to put my heart and soul into this, and I wanted to work with someone who would



**THE CHANGE**

A hilltop home is redesigned to take in the view and give the homeowner the accessible features he needs to enjoy his house indoors and out.

**WHAT IT TOOK**

Designing a master bathroom that blends universal design elements, including a roll-in shower, with a tranquil tub for guests.

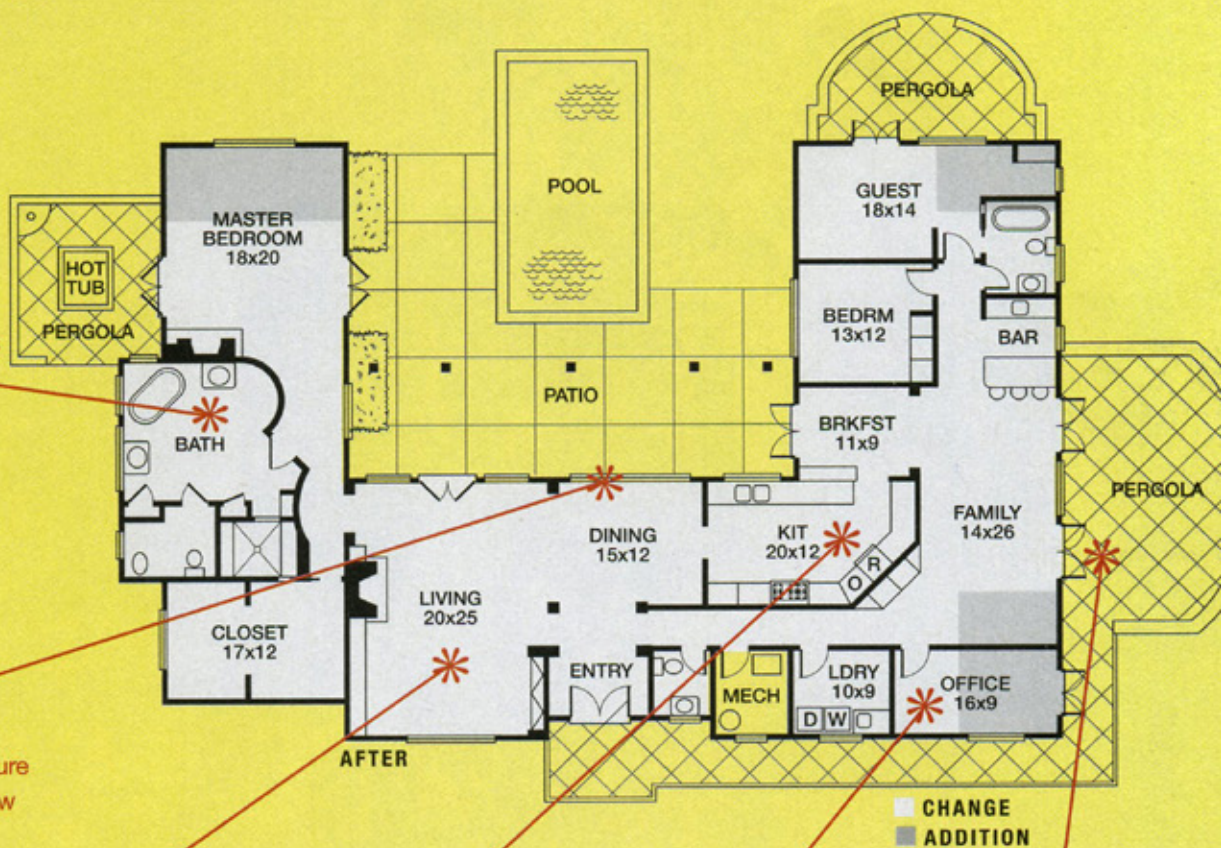
Enlarging and lowering existing windows to capture the view and allow the homeowner to see outdoors while seated in his wheelchair.

Reconfiguring several interior walls and raising ceiling heights to create a sense of spaciousness and light along with added accessibility.

Incorporating lower countertops, a drawer-style dishwasher, a below-cabinet refrigerator, and other user-friendly elements in the kitchen.

Enclosing a small porch to create a home office.

Creating outdoor spaces that are easily accessed through wide French doors.



■ CHANGE  
■ ADDITION





### **INSIDER'S TIP**

When it comes to making a home universally accessible, there are standard guidelines builders can follow, such as making doorways 4–6 inches wider than average. But designer-builder Emilio Casanueva prefers to exceed the guidelines in order to give everyone plenty of room to move. "I think every door should be wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair," he says. "And bathrooms should have plenty of room to move around. That's not just comfortable for people with disabilities. It makes sense for everybody."

Michael likes the way columns added throughout the house lend a warm, classic touch to rooms that might otherwise feel cold because they are so open to one another.





OPPOSITE: Michael accented his kitchen with beloved '50s appliances including a Magic Chef range and a Northstar refrigerator.  
ABOVE LEFT: A lower sink left open underneath makes a comfortable work space for Michael.  
ABOVE: For the fun of it, Michael included a restored vintage soda fountain, equipped with an accessible sink and cooler, in his redesigned home.

understand,” Michael says. “Emilio really got what I wanted from day one. We worked together on every step of the planning and all along the way.”

A key element of the redesign was taking advantage of the views. Michael couldn't see out most of the existing windows from his wheelchair, so they were enlarged and lowered. Three sets of French doors were added to give Michael greater access to the pool, patios, and an expansive outdoor garden that was devised by landscape designer Margie Grace. A small porch was enclosed to create a home office, adding 54 square feet to the house.

Ceilings were raised from 8 to 12 feet and some walls were reconfigured to create a more open, expansive feel. This also makes it easy for Michael to maneuver through the house. To add warmth and character, Michael incorporated several large columns and wide crown molding into the foyer, living room, and dining room.

Accessibility concerns were most important in the bathrooms and the kitchen. The changes Casanueva made, such as putting a spacious roll-in shower in the master bathroom, lowering some countertops in the kitchen, and adding a pot filler near the stove, are helpful to anyone, not just people with disabilities. “These are







**OPPOSITE:** Instead of a pedestal, two legs offer wheelchair access beneath the sink in the master bathroom.

**ABOVE:** "The bathroom really came together as the dream environment for me, and that was great because it's typically the area that is vital, yet the most challenging, everywhere you go," Michael says.

excellent ideas for everyone from aging baby boomers to people who have children or grandparents living with them," Casanueva says. "A lower countertop means kids can help make salad or bake cookies. And who wants to carry a heavy pot of water from the sink to the stove?"

For Michael, his redesigned home is no longer just a place to be. It's a place to enjoy his life to the fullest. "These days, there are so many design choices, it's not really that difficult to create a home that is both beautiful and accessible," he says. "If you look around my house, it doesn't look any different than any other house. But it gives me the freedom to live the way I want to live."





## UNIVERSAL DESIGN MEETS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Michael McConnell wanted to experience the outdoors—not just look at it. He hired landscape designer Margie Grace to help make the exterior of his home as accessible as the remodeled interior.

Throughout a Japanese garden planted in honor of Michael's grandmother, Grace created paths wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. She established more paths to give Michael access to additional seating areas and gardens, including a small vineyard. To make the paths of decomposed granite smooth enough for a wheelchair, she sprayed them with a polymer that sets up when dry to create a hard surface.

Because windowsills in Michael's house are intentionally low, just 18 inches from the floor, Grace was careful to arrange plants to look their best from Michael's inside vantage point.

LEFT: One way to save money on accessible elements is to avoid special orders, designer-builder Emilio Casanueva says. "We bought all three sets of French doors ready-made in the largest standard size," he says.