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ASKING ALL THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

It's Key for The Wills Company's
Beautiful Transformations

Written by Gloria Houghland

with commentary from Ridley Wills III

Horror stories are all too common regarding any type of home repair. A total renovation can keep us up at night wondering about a plethora of decisions that we may not feel qualified to make. And because most of us are not experts in the field, we can only pray for a positive outcome. Nothing is worse than someone who tells you they can do something, but simply doesn't deliver. Now your cost is doubled because you have to address the mess. That is why this issue's house feature is so refreshing. First, we will go inside a few renovation projects to take an in-depth look, and then we will introduce you to Ridley Wills III, if you don't already know him. A native Nashvillian, he is the owner and Design Director of The Wills Company, a design-build firm specializing in residential renovation for over 25 years.

Ridley graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in architectural history. He comes by his love of history naturally

from his father, Ridley II, who is considered the unofficial historian of Nashville having written over 25 books on our city. Ridley and his wife, Betsy, are avid art enthusiasts. In fact, Betsy's blog, www.artstormer.com, celebrates emerging artists from around the world. This passion for history and art come together beautifully in all the homes that Ridley and The Wills Company renovate. "Architecture actually chose me," said Ridley. "I went to school to learn about historic preservation, but the entire process of remaking spaces for today is what hooked me." His first house transformation was of a transitional Victorian cottage in East Nashville in 1984, long before that side of the river was made cool ... again.

Since then, The Wills Company's extensive experience and Ridley's keen eye are evidenced by the hundreds of homes that have been revitalized as a result of their efforts, some multiple times over.



AFTER



BEFORE

“A tight, outdated kitchen did not work for how this couple wanted to live and use this space. This kitchen is in a very traditional, 1980 townhouse filled with antiques. So, this contemporary, kitchen brings needed relief for our clients. Although the space is deceptively bright, the natural light is strategically placed to compensate for the client’s eye disease and does not cause her any discomfort. The windows face onto a relatively unattractive alleyway; so, reducing their size was strategic as well as attractive. The pop of royal blue in the island cabinets give the space some umph, as well. We reused the existing range and refrigerator, which gave us the stainless motif and saved cost in the process. -Ridley Wills III

“We don’t build new houses,” Ridley explained. “We help people reimagine, transform and maintain their existing homes.” As the company grew, Ridley determined there was a need for two distinct business models. One covering the renovation side of the business and one devoted entirely to the maintenance of their clients’ homes. “We offer a complete solution,” said Ridley. By so doing, the Wills Company has tackled two important niches in home ownership and more importantly, taken the worry factor out of it.

Recently, we visited with Ridley in a sleek, charcoal gray, conference room at his West Nashville office. He took us through several of his projects, before and after, and showed us how he envisioned solutions and opportunities for each of his clients. “I have no one architectural style which I prefer. Excellent design is what excites me and can make all the difference in a home, whether

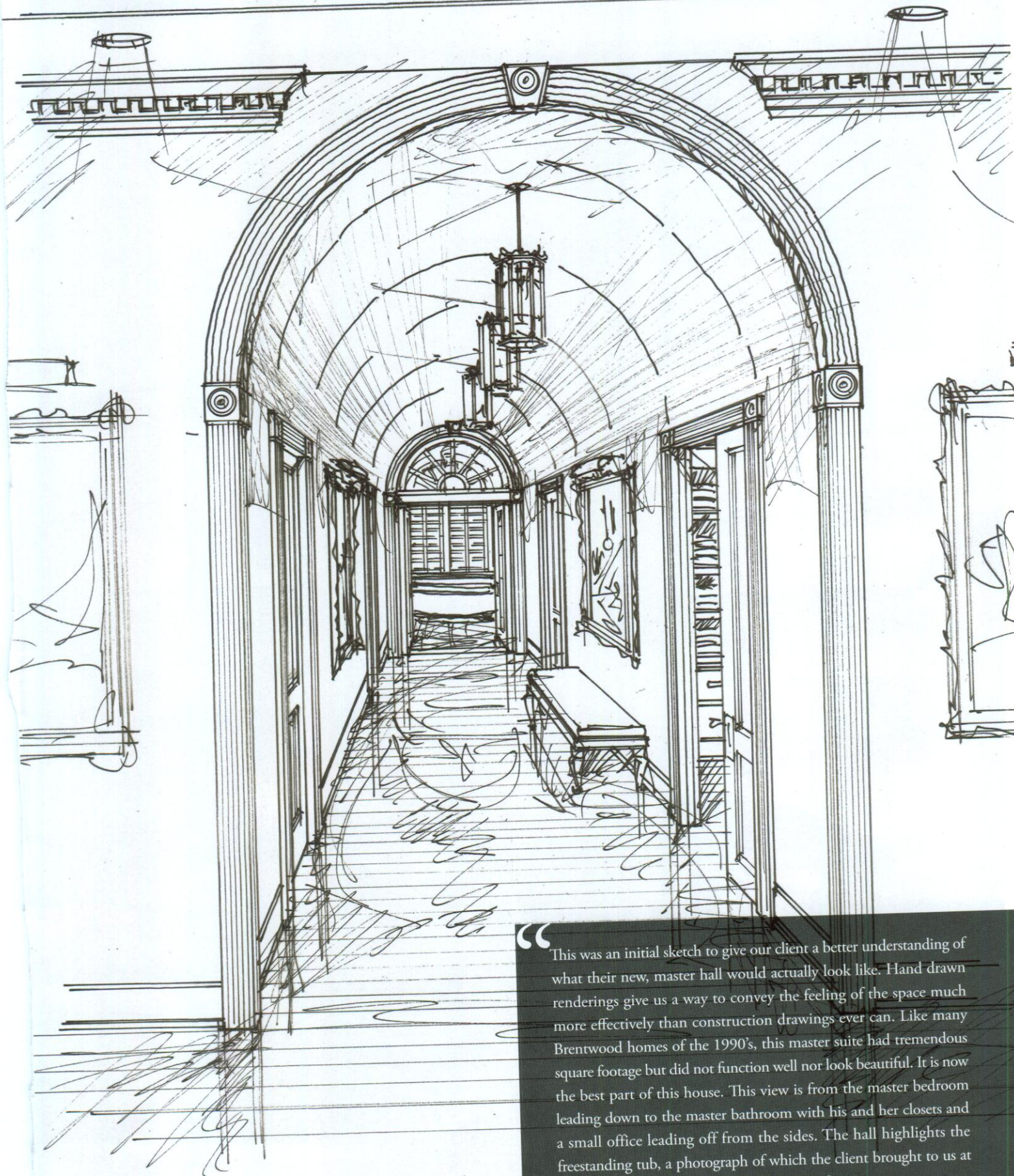
you realize it or not,” said Ridley. “The first step is listening to our client - What do you seek? What is the root problem you are trying to resolve? How much do you want to invest to do so? How can we help? The clearer we are, the more accountable we can be. I want to be as straightforward as possible. That’s why we provide fixed pricing so that you, our client, are in control.”

The following vignettes are all different, yet have one thing in common – Ridley’s unique vision. As he explained, “Each addition or renovation must work with the architectural integrity of the existing house. That’s the art of it. That’s what I bring to the table. It’s an aptitude and a gift that I have the pleasure to share. You can’t teach it.” As you peruse this portfolio notice the quality, attention to detail and the ability to solve difficult space challenges. This is the hallmark of The Wills Company.



“ This is part of a larger renovation. We converted a sunroom and former porch into a library/office for a noted author and historian. The use of this deep blue throughout all the wall and woodwork with the brass accents of the curtain rods, door hardware and wall sconces adds luster and richness to the space. We covered the concrete floor with wall-to-wall carpet both to bring warmth to the space but also to disguise its former use as an exterior space. We added to and embellished the existing bookshelves to make them both more prominent and stylish without having to break the budget!





“ This was an initial sketch to give our client a better understanding of what their new, master hall would actually look like. Hand drawn renderings give us a way to convey the feeling of the space much more effectively than construction drawings ever can. Like many Brentwood homes of the 1990's, this master suite had tremendous square footage but did not function well nor look beautiful. It is now the best part of this house. This view is from the master bedroom leading down to the master bathroom with his and her closets and a small office leading off from the sides. The hall highlights the freestanding tub, a photograph of which the client brought to us at the initial meeting. It is the perfect location for it!

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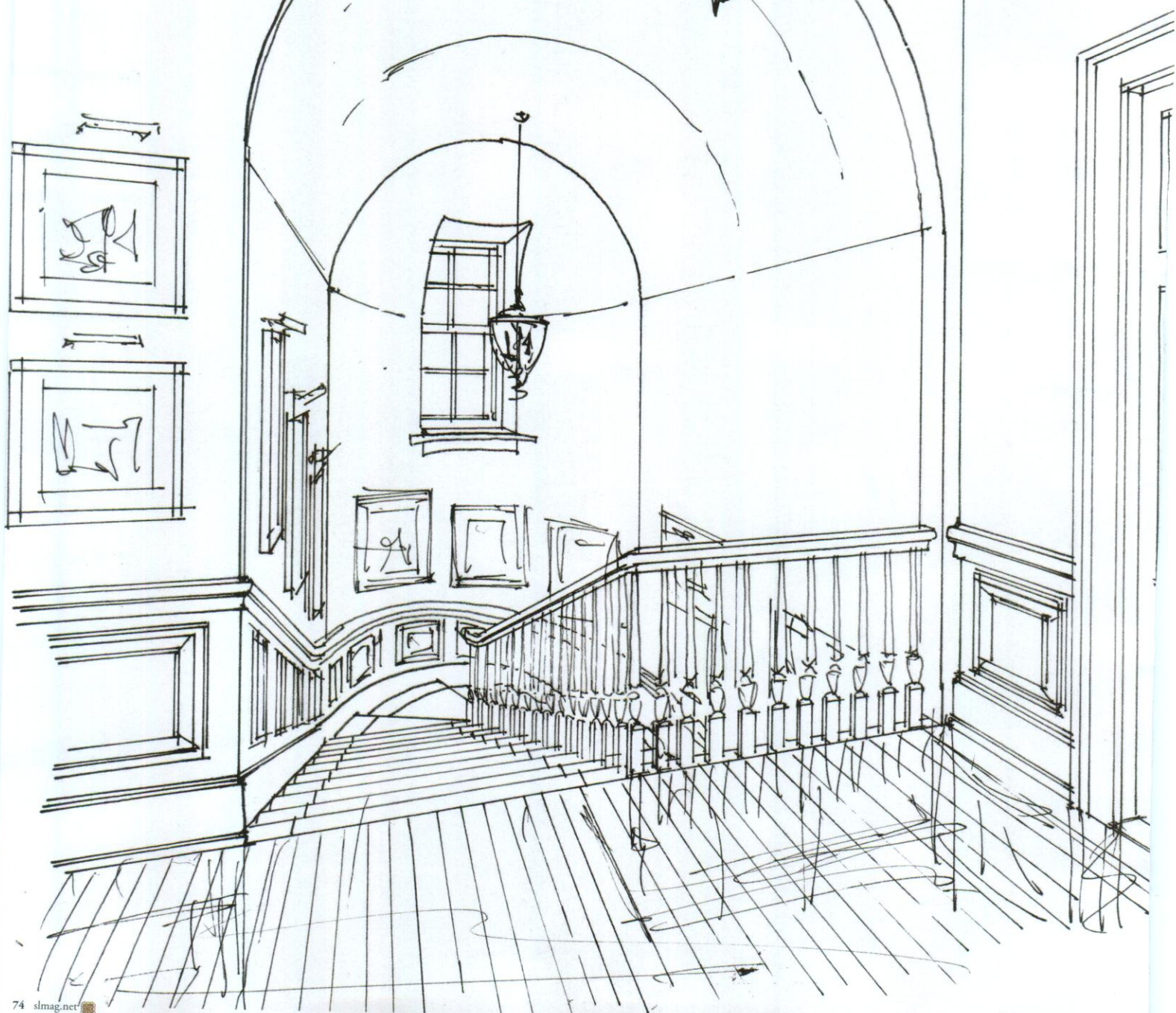
This is part of a larger renovation project. We transformed this family room in a 1950's era ranch house for a young family. With 8' tall ceilings, a critical design decision was made to raise and vault the ceiling. Its clean, arched design gives this space and this house much needed relief. The windows were also key to adding natural light to be enjoyed by all. The clean lines of the renovated fireplace also help update the space.





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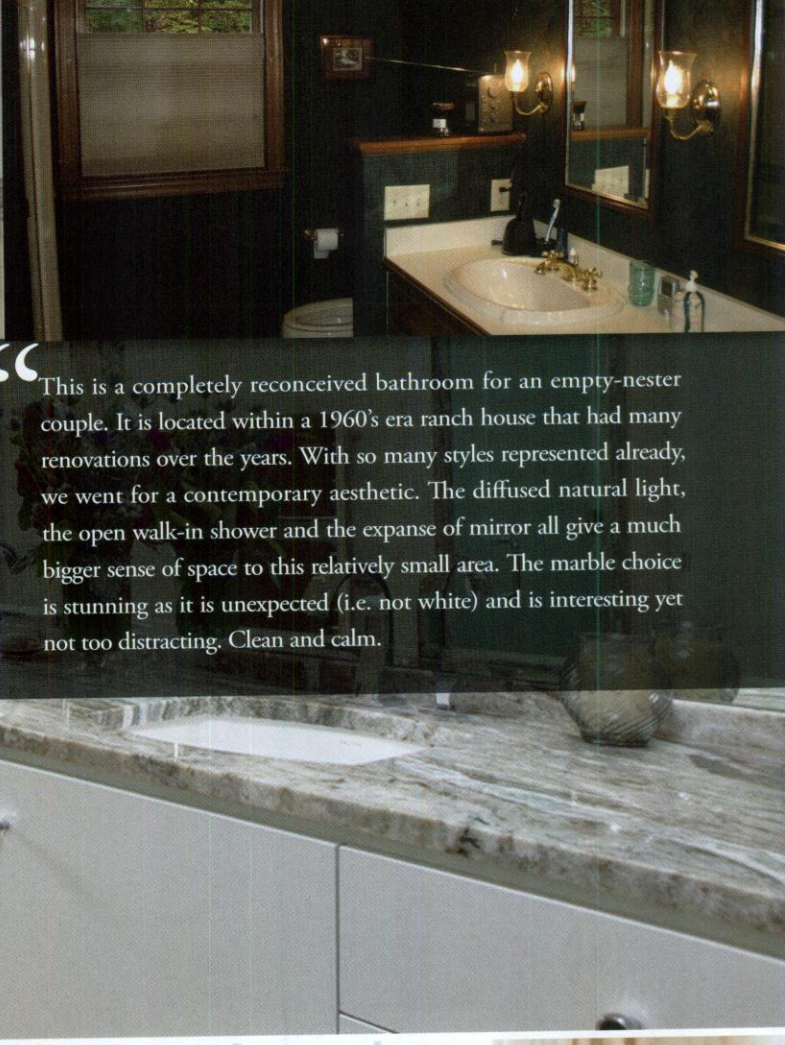
An initial rendering of an upstairs, stair hall and landing. It is a play on volume and space in a very traditional house setting. Classic and stylish, this private space is in no way neglected in the overall design. Seeing a sketch can give a client a feeling of what the new space will actually look like.







“This is a completely reconceived bathroom for an empty-nester couple. It is located within a 1960's era ranch house that had many renovations over the years. With so many styles represented already, we went for a contemporary aesthetic. The diffused natural light, the open walk-in shower and the expanse of mirror all give a much bigger sense of space to this relatively small area. The marble choice is stunning as it is unexpected (i.e. not white) and is interesting yet not too distracting. Clean and calm.



“Transitional and stylish. This is a portion of a master bathroom we added onto a 1950's era ranch house. These parents needed a calm, clean space for themselves to enjoy. It is contemporary but also harkens back to the traditional architecture of the house. The hardwood floors add contrast to the white of the cabinetry and marble finishes.



“This client had a strong and exceptionally refined design aesthetic. It is a tiny bathroom space that exudes luxurious and timeless elegance. In such a small space, the details become all the more important. The mirrors and the use of white marble with polished chrome pull the space together. All of the walls and ceiling are paneled and detailed, just like a well-fitted suit!



The Wills Company has over 450 clients and 20 employees. “Many of our maintenance clients have turned into restoration clients,” explained Ridley. “We have keys to people’s homes, we become enmeshed in their lives. We stay on top of codes and regulations. We also always write a letter to our client’s neighbors letting them know what we will be doing and if they have a concern with one of our sub-contractors, we are responsible. We are very aware that we are affecting the neighborhood.” My own experience with Ridley came when I asked him to look at our own

1960s ranch-style home. The home needed a total redo and within 10 minutes, we had an answer. Now, Ridley could have instantly said, “yes, we will start tomorrow,” but instead he asked one simple question: Was I going to live there forever or maybe one day sell it?

The reason for the question being that if the later was true, could I sell it for enough in that neighborhood to get my return on investment. The answer was no. A wasted trip for Ridley, a saving grace for me. That’s the kind of man Ridley is, and the kind of firm you find with The Wills Company. **sl**