

# Sunday

## Stealing beauty

We've got  
the dirt on  
blossom  
bandits,  
who pluck  
spring's  
flowers from  
planters and  
parks



### Home

Feather  
that  
empty  
nest

### Health

Going the  
distance  
for foster  
kids



## [Home]



Frank and Sandy Gelber's living room became a grown-up entertaining space when the kids moved out. BILL HOGAN/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTOS

# Freshly feathered nest

When the kids move out it's time to make a home you, your spouse and even the family will love

**By Tiffany Meyers**  
SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

When you walk through the front door of Frank and Sandy Gelber's home, the experience is something like taking a sip of ice water — only to discover a mouthful of kicky ginger ale instead.

From the porch of the clapboard farmhouse, which dates to the 1890s, any sensible person would expect a traditional interior. Wainscoting. Victoriana. Pooled drapery.

Then the front door opens, revealing the living room. Instead of chintz, you get crisp, cool lines. A palette of red, white and black. A large work by British artist Richard

Galpin, who explores the line between abstraction and representation, hangs above a white leather sofa. Sandy Gelber asked her designers, architecture and interior design firm Morgante Wilson Architects (MWA), to redo what was then a traditional room in 2005, when the Gelber's youngest daughter left for school.

Gelber had been warned of the "empty-nest syndrome." It would be lonely, people said. Full of longing and boredom. Remember Y2K? The catastrophe never transpired. "I think the 'empty nest' is the best-kept secret in life," says Gelber, who's as connected to her children as ever. "Our nest actually filled up with possibilities. I like to

think of it as a time to re-feather the nest."

Suddenly, the whole house was available. The Gelbers reconsidered how they would use the living room. "For so long, it was just the room we walked through to get to the front door. Now, it's a more adult space — truly a focal point for entertaining."

The Gelbers bought their house in 1984. At the time, the family's interior designer was, as Gelber says, "very persuasive." A homunculus French armoire sprang up in the family room, lordling over a traditional couch.

She began exploring the possibilities of a modern home around 2000, when the kids were older. Her neighbors, Elissa Morgante

## Remade right

Empty nest, you said? Not in this economy. This decade has seen a 25 percent increase in households with multiple generations living under one roof, according to the AARP. That's because adult children are returning home when employment eludes them, while boomers are increasingly caring for their elderly parents at home.

"All of this means versatile design is critical," says Marianne Cusato, designer of The New Economy Home, a model home that adapts to occupants' life stages over time. The award-winning designer offers these considerations for designing or buying a house that changes with your circumstances.

**1** Think of a ground-floor master bedroom as insurance. You might need a break from the stairs in coming years. It can also house your parents or "boomerang" children. If possible, give the suite its own entrance. It'll spare your parents the long walk through the house. Your children will like the privacy too.

**2** Use common sense when retrofitting bathrooms for wheelchair accessibility. "You don't

have to outfit every bathroom for something you're not sure if you or your parents will need," says Cusato. The better option: One bathroom that's ready to be converted if needed.

**3** Reclaim your spaces. The nook once reserved for homework is now available for your hobby. Take advantage of it. "This is also a great time to think about efficiency," Cusato adds. Now that the hockey equipment went to school with your son, you can actually hang coats in your coat closet.

**4** If you're buying new, look for homes within walking distance of community and retail activity. "Empty nesters want to be part of the action," says Cusato. "Connecting to a walkable community gives you that."

**5** When real estate pros tell you what your new house needs for resale purposes, remember: "Resale just isn't the most important thing for empty nesters," says Cusato. "The ideal is that you find the right home — so that you don't have to go back on the market. So that you can age in place."



and Fred Wilson, happened to be the founders of MWA. She asked if they'd help her find a new sofa for the family room, an oblong space at the back of the house.

One thing led to another: Gelber and MWA worked together for nearly a decade on a series of redesigns and a dining room addition. The living room is part of the most recent face-lift.

"You don't have to feel stuck with vacuous rooms that used to have the sound of little feet pitter pattering across the floor," says Morgante. "If you shape your home around what you want to do in the next phase of your life, it's an empowering process."

The children's bedrooms became an

office, a second family room and guest room, respectively. MWA also designed the first-floor library to double as a bedroom. "A downstairs master is important for an empty-nester home, because it allows people to age in place," says Morgante.

When Gelber talks about "more adult" rooms, she's not talking about stuffy rooms. Along with its clean lines, the house has a sense of humor: Upstairs, the well-used second family room features a funky, Mondrian-inspired built-in.

"The kids weren't thrilled about their bedrooms initially," says Gelber, "but they adapted. Now, I think they get more use out of the rooms than they did when they lived here."

The second family room, left, with its custom Mondrian-inspired media center, was once a bedroom for one of the Gelber children. In the family room, above, the sleek modern lines and kicky color scheme keep things fresh.