



Westridge
HOMES

Saskatoon, (306) 652-9974

Custom Homes and Interior Design
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Award Winning Customer Service

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Universal design meets family's need for accessibility

BY ASHLEIGH MATTERN

In the Nataraj family's open-concept living room and kitchen, abundant shelving displays photographs and mementos. Big windows face west over a linear park, giving them a full view of the sunset each day. The custom-built home is gorgeous, and it also happens to be barrier-free.

Westridge Homes designed the house not only for the comfort of parents Crystal and Richard, but also for their daughters Georgia and Charlotte, who have spinal muscular atrophy.

"We consciously made all of the windows low enough so somebody in a chair could still see the view," Crystal Nataraj explains. They also chose to use open shelving throughout the house in order to avoid hard-to-open drawers and cupboards.

Most of the universal design details are so



PHOTOS BY TARA LEFEBVRE & VIREO PRODUCTIONS

subtle, if no one pointed them out, you might not even notice.

“That was something we really tried to do, was make it not look utilitarian,” says Tara Lefebvre, a designer with Westridge Homes.

To accommodate the use of wheelchairs, there are very few floor transitions throughout the house. The light switches are lowered and the plug-ins are raised. Of particular help to people with spinal muscular atrophy, which weakens the muscles over time, are the automatic faucets in the kitchen and bathrooms. When designing the kitchen, Westridge didn't use the popular soft-close drawers because they're harder to open. The blinds are all powered to make them easy for anyone to open and close. “They're also quite fun!” says Crystal.

The benefits of a barrier-free design extend beyond their family, too. Through this experience with their daughters, they've met new friends who are also in wheelchairs. Having a universal home allows them to invite friends over with no worries about accommodating them.

“We have a friend who has the same condition as my daughter, and she bakes all the time, so she can come here and bake with us, whereas normally she can only bake in her home. It's nice to be able to welcome anybody into your house,” says Crystal.

The microwave and oven are set lower in the cabinetry, and the oven opens sideways to make it easier to access the contents from a sitting position. Similarly, the fridge has French doors on the freezer as well. The cooktop and sink have space underneath so someone in a wheelchair can pull right up.

Georgia and Charlotte will be able to cook up a storm – when they're old enough. Georgia is four years old and Charlotte is only two.

“They're not cooking yet!” says Crystal. “It's more for when they get that age; we don't want to be doing renos.”

An incredible amount of thought went into every decision involved in the design and construction of the home. They've future-proofed the house against anything they might have to tackle. The ceilings of the girls' bedrooms and bathroom are reinforced for installation of a ceiling lift; the bedrooms are set up to accommodate hospital beds if need be; and the house is wired for automation, such as voice activation, automated doors, or intercoms.

Both the Nataraj family and Westridge did a lot of research before designing the home, prior to construction. They spent about a year in planning mode, though building the house took about the



same amount of time as it would for any large, custom-built home. The builder's dedication to customer service recently earned Westridge Homes the prestigious Customer Choice Award, sponsored by the New Home Warranty Program of Saskatchewan. The award was bestowed on February 6 at the Bridges Awards, presented annually by the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association.

They moved in at the end of September 2015. Crystal says coming from a three-level home in Varsity View to this spacious bungalow in Evergreen was a shocking change.

"Georgia was never able to discover anything on her own," says Crystal of their old house. "Before, I was always carrying her everywhere.... Anything she wanted to do, she needed my help."

In their specially designed bungalow, Georgia can brush her teeth by herself, she can use the elevator to go upstairs or downstairs. Even the neighbourhood is more accessible, with safe paths connecting their home to the nearby schools currently under construction.

"She's gained so much independence.... Her being able to motor around in her devices is pretty amazing," says Crystal. 



BARRIER-FREE FEATURES INCLUDE:

- Gentle incline to the front door
- Extra large garage to accommodate a large accessible van or bus
- Space in the mudroom to store walkers, standers, wheelchairs and power chairs
- Safety gate on the stairs to protect against accidental tumbles for those in power chairs
- Pot filler on the stove
- High toe kicks in the kitchen and kitchenette so people in a chair can get close to the counter
- A lot of space in the dining room so someone in a wheelchair can easily move around
- Five-foot wide hallways
- Three-foot wide doorways
- Pocket doors slide into the wall instead of swinging in or out, creating an obstruction
- The girls' washroom is a wet room with no curb on the shower and includes a raised tub
- Hidden laundry chute sends clothes to a cupboard in the basement laundry room
- Walk-out basement for easy access to the backyard and the therapeutic swim spa

For more details, visit www.westridgehomes.ca



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