

Sunrooms Can Adapt To Atypical Configuration

With the right engineering and design skills, a sunny comfortable spot for enjoying nature are found in almost any home.

By John Byrd

If you were to survey recent additions to local housing, you would still find a preponderance of sunrooms that are little more than a box with lots of glass. Vendors sell sunrooms off the shelf. Still, with owners occupying their homes for longer stretches of time than in the past, area-wide expectations for sunrooms have been evolving.

Case in point, an asymmetrical, English conservatory recently completed by the glazing genre's reigning champion: Sun Design Remodeling Specialists of Burke. Not only was this amorphously-shaped "sunny spot" a regional (7 state) winner in the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's "Contractor of the Year" competition but, more importantly, it's an elegant family room-cum-art gallery custom-designed for particular tastes. And, in the owners view: something of a miracle, since a succession of contractors pointedly declared that nothing could be built in the allocated space that would hold up to the elements—particularly rain.

"I had to design a pretty unorthodox floor plan to fit the site," Jeremy Fleming, Sun Design's senior designer, acknowledges. "But what really *challenged us* was the professional consensus that a glass roof designed for these site requirements *couldn't be built*."

Hearing this, Fleming says he instantly recognized how much Sun Design's engineering culture has stayed ahead of the industry learning curve in their 20-plus years of contending with increasingly complicated building code.

To assure a leak-free glass roof, Fleming took steps to integrate the new space with the existing house. The addition's exterior flashing was extended under the existing structure's EIFS surface. The team also designed an auxiliary internal gutter system.

"You have to remember you can't stop water," says Sun Design principal Craig Durosko, who started his career fixing problems with commercial sunrooms. "You can only re-direct it."

Hence, most of the conservatory was custom-designed. Framing materials were delivered raw, then cut on-site to specification. So, too, the glass panels.

On the aesthetic front, the project's biggest challenge was "rationalizing" two radically different architectural languages. The austere linearity of the existing structure had to appear *seamlessly* conjoined to an English-style conservatory design. Yet the existing home's exterior cladding (brick at the lower level, stucco above) seemed, at first, to defeat any possibility of achieving the desired "open and warmly inviting" ambiance.

To reinforce visual unity, Fleming and team designed an exterior knee-wall constructed of matching brick that extends and reinforces the existing masonry motif.

With the new footprint now blended with the old, the designer next took a careful look at colors and tones—resolving to use existing neutral colors as background while selecting a mahogany finish for the interior framing and a darker bronze tone for the exterior aluminum frame.

As with any project of this type, assessing the impact a new outside enclosure on available light in the existing space is a critical.

"We've addressed this issue a lot", says Durosko. "But the starting place is the same: you study the site and note how nature responds to the existing structure. In the end, our job is to enhance visual continuum and natural light--so everything must be considered."



Sun Design Remodeling Specialist
5795 B Burke Centre Pkwy
Burke, VA 22015
703-425-5588
www.sundesigninc.com

Fleming notes that his team spent many afternoons observing the natural light cycles in and around the home, then painstakingly modeled a number of alternative designs aimed at finding optimal positions for side and roof panels relative to the windows in the existing house.

“The result is there’s very little light reduction in the existing house,” says Fleming. “And because we thought a lot about visual linkage, the woods feel very close.”