



# Accessible and Attractive

By Cathy Jean Maloney

This custom-built home in Downers Grove reflects the family's modern aesthetic and also their love of nature: every room faces an outdoor or courtyard view. Equally important, the home is comfortable for the couple and their three children including two daughters with special needs. Landscape architect Kris Barker of Barker Evans Landscape Architecture

combined sleek spaces with a special emphasis on accessibility. **1 Zero thresholds:** Level changes can pose problems for wheelchairs, and this is often the case when transitioning from indoors to outdoors. Additionally, in our region, snow buildup exacerbates the problem. Barker notes that so-called "zero threshold" door frames

are available; however they tend to be very expensive. By adding a border of ipe wood adjacent to the sliding doors, icy water can melt and escape, and the wood surface is nearly flush to the interior floor. "When you take someone out with a wheelchair, they don't have a bumpy experience," Barker says.

**2 Concrete aggregate hardscape:** "The client really wanted a clean, safe surface," Barker notes. Scored concrete aggregate offers that smooth surface, and the grid squares complement the modern architectural planes of the home.

**3 Space to move:** Note the ample space surrounding the table and other outdoor furnishings. This allows wheelchairs a proper turning radius and also offers an uncluttered, modern feel to the courtyard.

**4 Companion seating:** The seating wall in the foreground of this picture includes a generous concrete "floor" where a wheelchair can be comfortably positioned. This allows individuals in wheelchairs to sit companionably with those settled on the seating wall.

**5 Bridges not stairs:** An ipe "bridge" leads to the grass in the backyard. The bridge serves as a ramp for the wheelchairs and ties in with the ipe planking near the house.

**6 Climate control:** Three honey locust trees (*Gleditsia triacanthos f. inernis*) were planted in the courtyard. When mature, they will provide filtered shade to cool the hard surfaces. The small leaves of the honey locust mean easier cleanup and won't hinder the path of the wheelchair.

**7 Low maintenance varied plantings:** With three children, the homeowners can't spend their limited spare time pruning and weeding a garden. Easy boxwood (*Buxus* spp.) and *Pachysandra* offer evergreen views and low maintenance. Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) and spring bulbs provide sparks of color. Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) and serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.) add another layer of sculptural interest to the garden and complement its modern style. ▶



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