SECRET S FROM THE PROS: 44 KITCHEN DESIGN TIPS

A cozy home for mom
A farmhouse for the family
A cottage for a couple

RAZE OR RENOVATE?
A 5-point checklist

SHOWCASE STAIRS
6 Styles That’ll Transform Your Home

THE OOPS!
TOOL that every homeowner needs

THE $200 REMODEL
Crown a room with molding

DESIGN DISCOVERY
See-thru concrete
HOW A PAIR OF NEW YORK LOFT DWELLERS LEARNED TO LOVE A COUNTRY COTTAGE

GETTING GOTHIC RIGHT

hen my husband, John, took a temporary teaching job at Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota, it meant packing up our loft in New York City for life in a small town. I was game. After all, it would only be for two years. But I also needed something to do, since there wasn’t a big demand for caterers in Northfield. On the flight out, I told John, “I want to buy an old house from some little old lady, who hasn’t done a lot of stuff to it, and then fix it up. That will be my job.” Unfortunately, there were no old houses on the market. However, the realtor did show me a local architectural gem: An 1879 Carpenter Gothic owned by a 93-year-old woman who had inherited it from her parents. Even though it wasn’t for sale, we peeked in windows and walked around the yard. It had everything I wanted, from the lacy gingerbread detailing under the porch eaves to the steeply pitched gable roofline. And it was in a great location, across the street from a park. I told the realtor, “This is the house I want. Call me if it ever goes on the market.” [text continued on p. 67]

BY HOMEOWNER ELIZABETH SCHOTT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHAD HOLDER  STYLE BY D’ETTE ROBERTS

PROJECT PARTICULARS

TOTAL COST: Approximately $125,000.
HOW LONG IT TOOK: Altogether about three years, but there were three projects spread over a period of about nine years.
WHERE I SPLURGED: Custom cabinets in the kitchen and the Jacuzzi tub and separate freestanding shower in the bathroom—but we knew we were only going to do this once.
WHAT I’D DO DIFFERENTLY: Have the house inspected. We bought it strictly on curb appeal without ever having stepped inside. But we were young and first-time homeowners. We didn’t know any better.
BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Sizing the windows in the breakfast nook. We were 6 inches off all the way around, so when we sat down, we couldn’t see out.
HOW I SOLVED IT: All the custom windows had to be pulled out and a new larger set made and installed. It was a costly mistake.
BEFORE: The 1879 house, looking like it needed nothing more than some landscaping and a coat of paint, hadn’t had an interior update since the 1920s.

AFTER: Three renovations later, the house has been carefully modernized on the inside, and the exterior has been returned to its Gothic glory.
**WHAT WAS DONE**

1. **ENLARGED THE KITCHEN.** The old kitchen and adjoining side porch were gutted and replaced with a new 10-by-23-foot kitchen and mudroom/pantry. A breakfast nook with banquette seating was built into a bay window that echoes an original on the front of the house.

2. **IMPROVED TRAFFIC FLOW** by opening the kitchen to the dining room with a pass-through.

3. **ADDED A 256-SQUARE-FOOT SCREENED-IN PORCH** and adjoining deck.

4. **REPLACED A SMALL WINDOW** in the dining room with French doors to access the deck. New French doors also separate the kitchen from the porch.

5. **ADDED WINDOWS.** A small bay window was added to the downstairs bathroom and a full bay was added to the family room to bring in light.

6. **BUILT A FIREPLACE.** The house's first (and only) fireplace was built in the family room.

7. **CONVERTED AN EFFICIENCY APARTMENT** upstairs into a large bathroom.

**TOP:** The homeowners made exact replicas of the dilapidated decorative brackets, borrowing jigsaws from the local college.

**ABOVE:** A bay window in the living room frames a cozy sitting alcove.
Shortly after that, I got the call: The owner had moved to a retirement home, and someone had already put in a bid. We upped it by $1,500—and the house was ours.

A QUICK FACE-LIFT

Although most of the original details, like the ornate interior trim and chandelier ceiling medallions, were intact, I also knew I had my work cut out for me. Every surface, including the ceilings, was covered with dark, gloomy wallpaper—a daunting task to remove from ancient plaster. The hardwood floors and spiral staircase in the front entry were worn down to the raw wood, and the upstairs had been fashioned into a makeshift rental apartment.

Even the charming front porch was dangerously rickety. And then there was the kitchen. It hadn’t been touched since the 1920s, didn’t have a refrigerator, and the stove leaked gas. We started by having the stove removed, but since we had just spent our life savings on the house, we could only afford a secondhand stove and refrigerator. But that was fine. We figured that once John started earning a salary, I’d have the money to start getting the house ready for resale.

While John spent his days in the classroom, I spent mine machine-sanding oak floors, scraping wallpaper off ceilings and walls, and refinishing the time-worn staircase. One day I got a little crazy and took a crowbar to the grimy kitchen cabinets. John couldn’t believe that I had actually torn them out myself. It was just sheer determination on my part. A local college kid helped us install new stock cabinets and lay a new linoleum tile floor.

Outside, we hired a contractor to pour new footings for our decaying porch, but John and I replicated the rotting gingerbread trim ourselves. We traced the old patterns onto new cedar boards and used jigsaws from the college’s art
The backyard arbor, with its pointed arch and lattice roof, is an exact replica of the original, which had fallen down after the homeowners moved in. The owners also rebuilt the adjoining Gothic picket fence.

department to cut them. Right on schedule, in just under two years and for a few thousand dollars, we had managed to successfully update our fixer-upper.

The investment might have turned a tidy profit if John hadn’t been offered a permanent professorship. And by then, we had fallen in love with the house and the idea of starting a family and putting down roots.

RETHINKING OUR PLANS

The arrival of our son, Wiley, a year later, spurred us to make changes to our home. We tore out the old upstairs apartment and replaced it with a new, modern bathroom with a Jacuzzi and a freestanding shower. To keep the vintage feel of the house, we added a pedestal sink and an antique mirror that had been in John’s family. One of two small bedrooms became the baby’s room and the other became our bedroom. Downstairs, the old formal parlor, which we had been using as a bedroom, became part family room and part John’s home office.

In the next few years, between opening a restaurant and raising Wiley, I was too busy to work on the house. But I still had dreams of updating the kitchen with new appliances and expanding it to include an eating area. And John and I had talked about adding a master bedroom suite with walk-in closets and a bigger bath. Finally, we took our dreams to an architect who drew up plans to convert the attic space at the rear of the house and raise the rooflines to accommodate a 500-square-foot master suite upstairs and a 230-square-foot kitchen with a soaring ceiling downstairs. The rooms would be large and contemporary in style.

But a few days before construction started, we got cold feet. Not only did the scale and style of the addition not match our modest period house but a friend pointed out that it wasn’t even giving us the three things that he thought made a house a home: a family hub, a fireplace, and a screened-in porch to take advantage of Minnesota’s mild summers. We knew he was right and immediately began sketching a new plan.

DOING IT RIGHT

The new design centered on the kitchen at the back of the house. If it was to be the hub of our home, it had to be big enough for family and friends to hang out. To gain the necessary space, we gutted the old kitchen and an adjoining side porch. That made room for a breakfast nook set in a bay of casement windows, as well as a pantry/mudroom. The kitchen would also be connected to our new 16-by-16-foot screened-in porch.

The house never had a fireplace; it had originally been heated with cast-iron stoves. So our plan called for building a fireplace in the living room. And while we were at it, we could add another bay window to let in more light, build a deck off the new porch, and update the bathroom downstairs. The contractor winced but agreed to all our changes, while a draftsman friend translated our scribbles into a blueprint.

I wanted every detail to be right, especially the bay windows. So I found a local woodworker who made the windows in the new part of the house closely resemble the originals. But one side of the house still troubled me. It was basically a big, boring expanse of siding. So I drove all over the county, looking at houses of a similar era. On one, I discovered a small projecting bay window, which I later found out is called an oriel. I had it duplicated by our window maker, who installed it in the downstairs bathroom. Outside, it gives the house an authentic Victorian look; inside, it provides a ledge for toiletries.

We must have done something right in our renovation, because there’s not a week that goes by that someone doesn’t knock on the door saying, “If you’re ever going to sell this house, let me know.” We nod and smile politely. But inside we’re saying, Not a chance!
BRACKETS
The original porch brackets were duplicated right down to the cut-out quatrefoil and floral scrollwork patterns by tracing the designs onto new 1¼-inch-thick stock.

DISTINCTIVE GOTHIC TOUCHES
The homeowners not only wanted to preserve their house's original features but also went to great lengths to closely replicate them.

MAILBOX
Although the reproduction wooden mailbox is not original to the house, it adds to the vintage look. The homeowner found it in a catalog.

WINDOWS
Bay windows were used in Gothic architecture to create interesting silhouettes on the facade. The homeowners added three new bays to the back and side of their house. TOP: A full bay frames the kitchen breakfast nook and was modeled after the original bay on the front of the house. CENTER: A square bay was added to bring more light into the family room. BOTTOM: The new single bay, or oriel, window was copied from another vintage home in the area. It cantilevers out with a low gable roof and a simple wood base.

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