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Renovating with a light touch

Advertising

a Denver architect seamlessly merges old and new
By Michael Leccese



Emily Minton-Redfield

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Architect:

Doug Walter Architects. [Click here to read more about the architect for this project.](#)

Interior design:

Interior Design Partnership

Builder:

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Lynn and Dennis Blum are bankers who returned to live in Denver in 1994 after five years in London. This potentially jolting transition from green-and-pleasant-land to the Great Plains was smoothed over when they found a 1928 Tudor in Park Hill, a neighborhood loaded with other stately English Tudors along its leafy parkways. With the help of preservation architect Doug Walter, AIA, and his associate Hamid Khellaf, the Blums expanded the brick period home with an addition that “looks like it was always there,” says Lynn. “The past gives you comfort and it’s important for a house to have continuity.”

The initial sighting of their new home was at midnight, and the Blums were stirred by what Walter calls its “pre-Depression workmanship,” like the patterned brick facade trimmed in limestone. Their spirits sank when they returned to the 3,500-square-foot house in the light of day. Lynn realized that “the house is on the wrong side of the parkway for sun exposure.” With only small north-facing windows in the kitchen, the interior was as dark as an East End pub at twilight. They made an offer anyway, which was quickly accepted, and then spent several years saving and planning for a remodel that would both brighten and expand their home.

Enter Doug Walter, whose work they discovered on a neighborhood house tour. An acolyte of legendary preservationist James Marston Fitch of Columbia University’s preservation program, Walter has developed a solid reputation for what he calls “gentle remodels” of historic homes. Over a two-year period, Doug Walter Architects and the Blum family effected a two-stage remodel that fills the house with natural light while adding a family room, a two-car “carriage house,” and a trio of outdoor courtyards and patios.

“Our initial goal was to expand the kitchen,” says Lynn, who proposed a greenhouse addition to bring in light. But Walter was loath to change the house’s basic lines. Eyeing a one-car attached garage hogging morning exposure, the architect envisioned a whole new floor plan. “Push that wall out 10 feet and you’ve got a family room,” he said.

Copying an arc-topped window detail from the front facade, Walter specified an 8-by-9-foot divided window for the back of the kitchen, which flows into a new 18-by-31-foot family room with 10-foot ceilings. This new aperture scoops in light, while “borrowed” light seeps in through a new spiral stair leading to Dennis’s home office. Track lights and white Formica cabinets, the result of a bad 1980s remodel, made way for new cherry kitchen cabinets that complement the family room’s built-ins for computer, TV, and fireplace.

“The home is all about contemporary lifestyles in a vintage setting,” says Walter, who replaced the 1928 metal casement windows with energy-efficient replicas. Steam heat has given way to hot-water heat that reuses the original cast-iron radiators.

On the exterior, after workers ripped off the garage roof, Walter began reassembling the facade with unobtrusive changes. Once flat, the rear wall now projects a tall, sharply angled gable bisected by two new gables. Both are clad in wood shingles painted dark green. An arc over new French doors parallels the arc of the new kitchen window.

A master ironworker replicated railings with a flat-twist pattern from the front of the house for two additional “Juliet” balconies. One overlooks a sandstone patio that spills from French doors to the new two-car garage. The courtyard is one of three outdoor sitting areas that allow the Blums to shift spots for outdoor entertaining and relaxing with the seasons.

Inspired by the character of detached carriage houses, the well-detailed brick garage is placed on the

“toboggan run,” according to Walter.

Having lived through the remodel while raising teenagers, the Blums now plan to stay for good—even though the kids are off to college. “They’ll have to carry us out,” says Lynn, adding she is especially pleased that “the neighbors are happy with the results.” The couple hopes their efforts will spawn others by those willing to take the time and care to do remodels that fit in.

Based in Boulder, Colorado, Michael Leccese has written on design for Architecture magazine, Metropolis, and the New York Times.

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