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INTERIOR DESIGN

Hidden Potential

UPDATING A MID-CENTURY RAMBLER | BY JOHN BYRD

What's to be done with a 67-year-old house on a quarter-acre lot in one of Northern Virginia's more desirable suburbs? Investment adviser Carol May purchased a circa-1950 brick rambler back in 1994. As the years rolled by, she considered enlarging the home's main block, upgrading the kitchen, maybe even converting a small room into a den for TV viewing.

Like many post-war homes, the kitchen was small. At just 40 sq. ft. (and equipped with Truman-era appliances), staging a multi-course meal required a lot of juggling. "There was never enough counter space to start one dish cooling, while other ingredients are

peeled and sliced and a third is marinating," May recalls. "Ironically, I really love cooking, but to explore complex recipes I was going to need a different kitchen."

Not to be undone, May was quietly contemplating several kitchen enlargement scenarios when fate played a hand. "We had so much rainfall one spring that our backyard flooded," she says. "The water ruined our enclosed sun porch and the entire basement. Parts of the house started showing signs of rot. I knew I had to take action."

Soon the homeowner began making sketches of dream-home improvements and soliciting feedback from local remodelers.

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—Sonny Nazemian



“Analyzing the capabilities of competing remodelers is essential to finding the right fit for your house,” May says. “I knew I wanted an addition extending off the back of the house—but I also knew that this would entail removing a bearing wall.”

“The feasibility of this concerned me,” she adds. “Some friends had decided against this technique as being too risky. But I decided I’d investigate the real-world experience of remodelers I was considering for the job. I particularly looked at projects that had grappled with challenges similar to mine. Among other things, I wanted an addition with a cathedral ceiling— which have to be perfectly reconciled with the existing interior’s flat ceiling.”

Eventually, May received four bids, but quickly decided on Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes because of their track record in rehabilitating older homes. “The company’s range is impressive,” May says. “They’re equally strong in engineering, space planning and interior design. Plus, their showroom made finish work selection easy.”

From the outset, Michael Nash founder and CEO, Sonny Nazemian, envisioned an architecturally sympathetic addition, with an appropriate-scale inside and



Page 43: A three-stool dining counter provides a convenient gathering spot midway between the dining room and the hearth. May says she can comfortably entertain 20 or more guests. “The circulation between the existing house and the addition works really well,” she says.

Above: The new 400 square foot kitchen/family room suite incorporates the footprint of the original galley kitchen and segues directly into an existing dining room. As a south-facing addition, the transom windows and sliding glass door invite a significant increase in natural light; and “before” as a consequence of unexpected flooding, the 14’ x 10’ garden room on rear of the house had begun deteriorating rapidly.

Opposite: A granite hearth, flat screen television and close-up view of a backyard brimming with azaleas in the spring forms the parameters of an easily accessible family room. Michael Nash facilitated the installation of both the gas fireplace and audio speakers which are concealed in the ceiling.





out. The plan entailed removing some 16 linear feet of bearing wall on the rear elevation, then insinuating a horizontal steel I-beam balanced on a pair of vertical shafts concealed behind new walls. The beam supports the existing roof. The interior juncture of old and new is trimmed-out as an archway which segues from the dining room directly into the new kitchen/family room suite.

Generously designed, the addition is 400 sq. ft. (24' x 16') with a 14-ft. cathedral ceiling, large windows brimming with natural light, and double French doors that segue to the site of a future patio.

To pass muster with Fairfax County, the contractor had to contend with back yard terrain that ascended at a 20-degree angle from the home's rear door. To form the footprint needed for the new addition, the design/build team excavated down three feet from the existing surface. The entire backyard was then re-seeded.

To manage water runoff, Michael Nash introduced a French drain and swell linked to an infiltration trench. "There can be surprisingly daunting engineering issues when working in uneven terrain," Nazemian says. "Because compaction issues are so exacting, a lot of contractors won't take on projects like this.



Above: To create access to the spacious new kitchen/family room suite, remodeler Michael Nash removed a rear elevation bearing wall and insinuated a steel I-beam on concealed vertical posts to support the roof. New oak flooring perfectly matched to the 1950's original reinforces visual unity. Cherrywood cabinetry, colonial gold granite surfaces and white and saffron gold wall paint explore a play of contrasting lights and darks that confer balance in a long open room that ascends into a cathedral ceiling; and the "before" dining room view into kitchen

Opposite: Although sight lines extend from the rear of the house to the front, well-defined gathering places and thoughtful design detailing impart a warmly intimate ambiance on an otherwise voluminous space. "Skillful interior design is essential when executing this kind of open floor plan," says Michael Nash founder and CEO Sonny Nazemian.



But with foundation issues resolved, the remodeler's attention turned to the new addition's space plan and interior design. "In a long open room it's necessary to design-in distinctive focal points that will reduce any impression that the enclosed space is cavernous," the remodeler says. "On this point, carefully articulated gathering places within a visual continuum provide a framework for making style statements while allowing sight lines to remain open. A recurrent color or textural theme, for instance, creates an offsetting sense that the large open room is comprised of many smaller intimate spaces each designed for a specific purpose. This is one way of scaling-back any impression that an open plan is undefined and, therefore, impersonal."

Along these lines, Nazemian designed the room's rear elevation as a cozy family room that happens to be visible from any point within the addition. A pair of 5' x 5' windows flank a hearth framed with a distinctive granite surround. Above, two triangle-shaped transom windows provide a distinctive geometric pattern, yet are also sources for the abundant natural light that floods the addition from back to front.

To reinforce the room's prevailing color scheme, May

found a furniture maker who fashioned a pair of hearth-side tables out of cherry wood matched to the tone and texture of the wood used in the kitchen cabinets,

Meanwhile, a row of leather lounge chairs facing in towards the hearth function as a space divider reinforcing the TV viewing zone's relative privacy.

The kitchen is, likewise, zoned for both counter dining and a work station that facilitates multi-tasking. A three-stool dining counter provides a convenient gathering spot midway between the dining room and the hearth. From this vantage point, one can watch the flat screen TV, or chat with the cook preparing a meal.

At 15' x 15', the cook's station is large enough to accommodate complex multi-course meals. Surfaces on either side of the stove extend 4 ft. in both directions before forming a "U" that incorporates a two-unit clean-up sink.

The counter's last leg doubles as serving station to the formal dining room, which remains exactly where it was before the new addition was built.

"The interior design style is unified and cohesive throughout," May notes. "In the end, this is very much one house—but a house with many beautiful facets." é

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