




Fine Homebuilding
2016
HOUSES
AWARD

BEST TRADITIONAL HOME

This year's award for best traditional home goes to designer/builder Anthony Harnden and designer Karen Brasier for their Houston rehab. The team added a second floor to a dilapidated bungalow, filling it with Arts and Crafts details to make it saleable in today's market while keeping it in scale with the neighborhood.



21st-Century Bungalow

A bigger kitchen and a second floor combine with period details to update a Texas spec project

BY KAREN BRASIER

I work with many builders whose mindset is to tear down old houses and replace them with new ones that are as large as site restrictions allow. Most of these builders give little thought to respecting the character of a historic neighborhood. Houston has only a few established historic districts that protect older homes, so it takes people who see the value in these buildings and neighborhoods to preserve them. One of these people is Anthony Harnden. I've worked with his firm, The Contemporary Craftsmen, on projects ranging from repurposing a 1929 brick commercial building into residential lofts to historic bungalow renovations such as this one. The common thread has been making these beautiful structures relevant for the 21st-century housing market.

Harnden approached the company that I work for, Design3 Studio, to draw the plans for this project. He had purchased a vacant and deteriorating single-story bungalow. The structure sat on a typical 50-ft. by 100-ft. lot in the Brooksmith neighborhood. While Brooksmith isn't a historic district, it borders the Heights, a neighborhood that does enjoy some historic-preservation protection. Brooksmith dates from the same time and has many similar homes.

Harnden's idea was to renovate the house to sell. He wanted to save as much of the existing structure as possible while creating additional bedrooms and living space to draw in contemporary buyers. Equally



Looks old, doesn't it? It's almost all new. The only salvageable interior elements were the hardwood floors and a few walls.

important for Harnden was bringing back the historical character of the house. To make this project work, he wanted to think creatively about the house's floor plan, structure, environment, outdoor space, and relation to the neighborhood.

Old-house problems

The existing house was ugly. The original siding had been replaced with vinyl, and except for the hardwood floors, none of the interior finishes were original or salvageable.

As with most historic bungalows, the floor plan presented a challenge. My firm has reworked many bungalows, so I was not surprised to see the layout: two small bedrooms with a bath between them on one side of the

house, and a living room, dining room, and small kitchen on the other side. To make this house appealing to contemporary families, we would need to expand the kitchen as well as add a master suite and a few more bedrooms. We would also need to figure out how to add parking space, since the lot lacked a garage or on-site parking and the house's position didn't allow for a driveway.

We also faced bringing the structure up to current code. The obstacles included a lack of insulation, existing ceiling framing that couldn't support the second floor we wanted to add, and a pier-and-beam foundation that was shifting, out of level, and unable to carry an additional load. The Contemporary Craftsmen has six full-time carpenters who

have developed the special skills necessary to work on historical homes. They handled the rough carpentry, as well as bringing their skills to bear on the custom trimwork.

Updating the downstairs plan

Our first move was to tear down a poorly constructed previous addition. Then, since we had to lift up the house to level and reinforce the foundation anyway, we moved the house to make room for a driveway and carport. We extended the house into the backyard, increasing the size of the kitchen and creating a family room that flows into a large screened back porch.

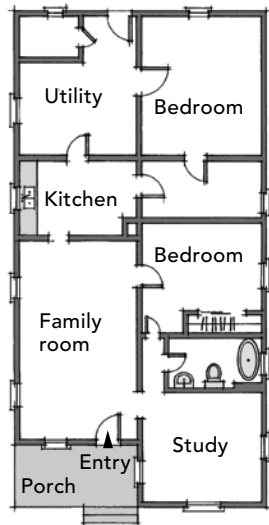
The former living room became a foyer, and we converted the small dining area



A PLAN FOR TODAY'S MARKET

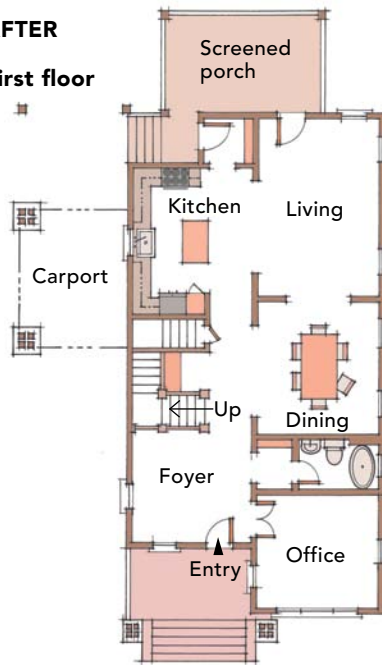
Neither the size nor the layout of the existing house suited the current real-estate market. A revamped first floor and a new second floor updated this spec remodel.

BEFORE

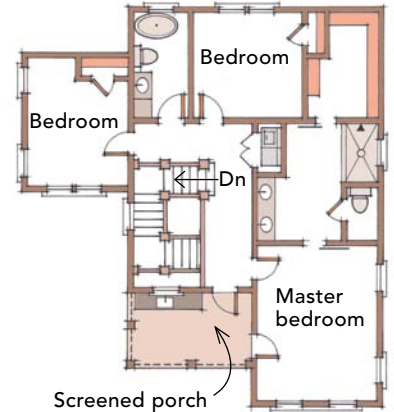


AFTER

First floor



Second floor



◀ North

0 2 4 8 ft.

SPECS

Bedrooms: 3, plus office

Bathrooms: 3

Size: 2552 sq. ft.

Cost: \$200 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2015

Location: Houston

Architect: Karen Brasier, Design3 Studio, design3inc.com

Designer/builder: Anthony Harnden, The Contemporary Craftsmen

Custom and cherry. Inset doors with exposed hinges and decorative muntins on the panels are old details on the new cabinets made by the builder's crew.



NEW PERIOD DETAILS



Imbuing a sense of nostalgia through carefully developed details was a primary goal in this project. We researched period Arts and Crafts details to replace lost elements. Most light fixtures and hardware are restored antiques. Extended casings, trim details that include rectangular patterns and piercings on the stairs and cabinets, and numerous built-ins hark back a century in time. The cedar-clad exterior, salvaged divided-lite windows, and cascading gables take the period details outside.

and hardware are restored antiques. Extended casings, trim details that include rectangular patterns and piercings on the stairs and cabinets, and numerous built-ins hark back a century in time. The cedar-clad exterior, salvaged divided-lite windows, and cascading gables take the period details outside.



Pierced framework



Built-ins



Cascading gables



Extended casing

Looks new, doesn't it? The plumbing fixtures and lights are refurbished antiques, while the mosaic tile floor typifies Arts and Crafts style.

to house a staircase. The front bedroom and the hall bath remained in their original locations, but we specified larger doors for the bedroom, which became a home office and optional bedroom.

Upstairs was a blank slate

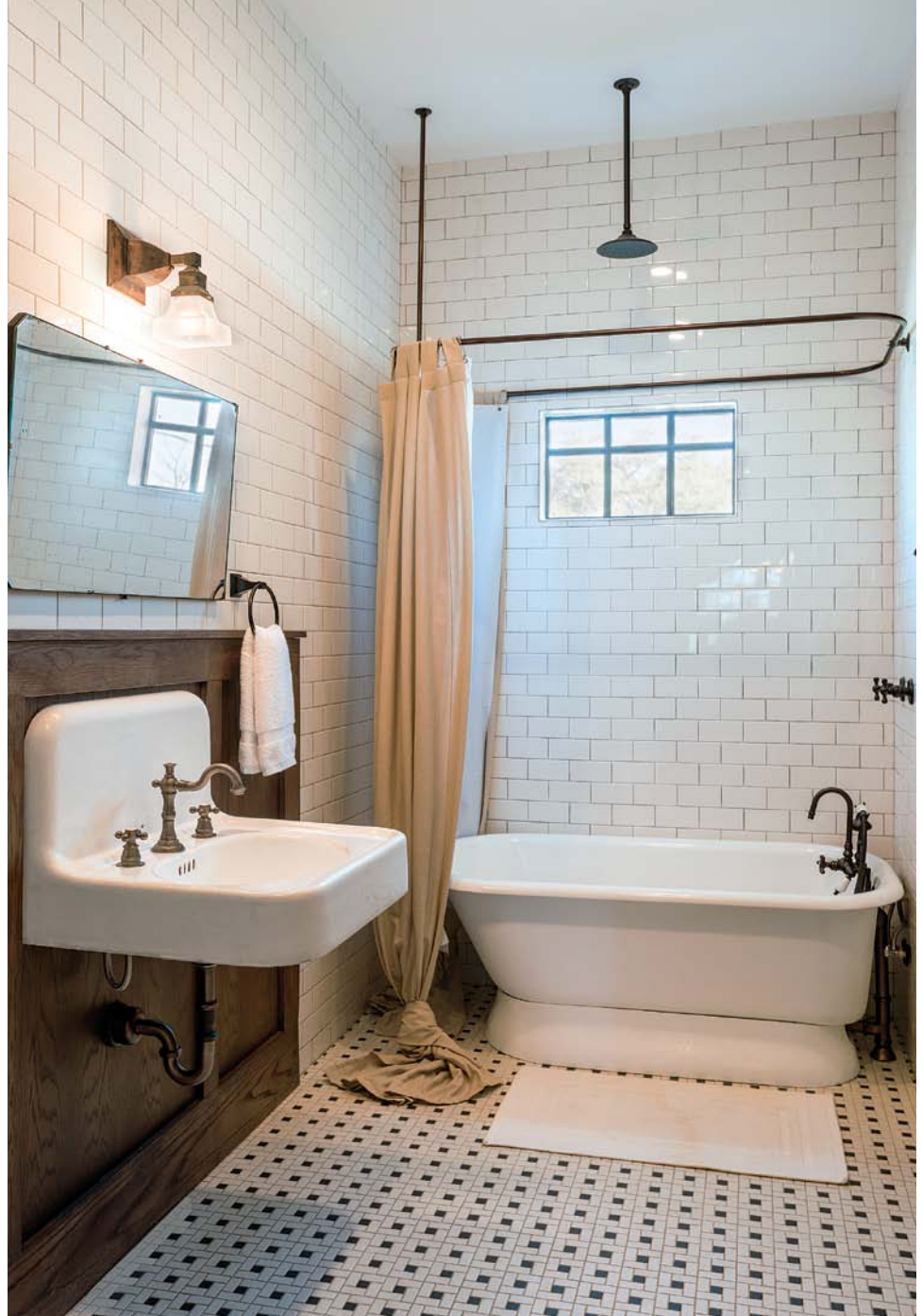
To carry the loads from the new second floor, we replaced the ceiling joists with engineered joists. Says Harnden, "We made sure to place the master bedroom and screened porch at the front of the house. This part of the neighborhood is heavily lined with oak trees, and when you are on the screened porch off the master bedroom, you have a great vantage point looking through the massive oak branches. It feels very personal and private, almost like being a kid in a tree house."

We kept in mind the exterior massing as well as the interior flow. By stepping the second floor back from the front of the original house, we maintained the scale and prominence of the first-floor porch. The massing gave us a dynamic formal composition with a variety of depths and allowed multiple gables. We designed a low-slope roof with large eaves, where The Contemporary Craftsmen crew placed large wood brackets, a trademark of the Arts and Crafts style.

Take space from the outdoors

With its two screened porches, this house emphasizes connection with the outdoors. "My dream house has always been in a natural setting," says Harnden. "Instilling an intuitive sense that this house is part of a natural setting in the middle of Houston was a challenge. Other than the street trees, the lot had very little foliage at the start of the project, so landscaping was done early in the process in order to allow the trees to get established. The goal was to have a view of a tree from every window."

In Houston, simply accessing the outdoors is not enough. Everything is bigger in Texas, including the mosquitoes and the summer humidity levels, so amenities that make the outdoors more comfortable are valuable. Harnden screened both the downstairs rear porch and the porch off the master bedroom, along with adding ceiling fans that cre-



ate a breeze in the hot Texas summer. The upstairs porch even has a wet bar.

As much as we wanted to let the outdoors in, we had to keep it out. Many bungalows in Houston end up with warped wood floors when new central air-conditioning creates a large temperature and humidity discrepancy between the indoor and outdoor space. Harnden mechanically vented the crawlspace to keep the moisture level in the original wood floors more consistent.

The original open front porch was rebuilt with larger columns and warm brick steps to create a welcoming approach to the house. A classic front porch encourages going out and

interacting in the neighborhood in a way that many contemporary designs do not.

The house is a great example of how development can respect the character of a historic place. Even while increasing the size of the house, we maintained a modest scale that doesn't tower over the neighbors. The careful approach to the floor plan and the attention to detail by the builder made for a quality product that exceeds the standards of the pricier neighborhoods nearby. □

Karen Brasier is senior designer at Design3 Studio in Houston. Photos by Peter Molick.