



Lake Cottage Overhaul

Limited by site and zoning, this lakeside remodel developed a new form within the same footprint

BY ROSEMARY McMONIGAL

Warren and Donna came to me ready to simplify their lives and trade their large Lake Minnetonka home for a small cottage on the water. However, they weren't willing to let go of the fine detailing and beauty that years of antique-collecting had taught them to appreciate. They wanted to keep as many of their antiques as possible, but enjoying this Minnesota lake from a comfortable home was their most important goal.

As it turned out, they fell in love with a small piece of land nestled between public walking trails and Lake Minnetonka. A ne-

glected house sat 8 ft. from the lake, but to build on the site, zoning regulations required that the house be kept in its existing footprint.

An overhaul was necessary to give Warren and Donna the quality materials, spaces, and cottage architecture that they envisioned. By preserving the exterior shape of the house, we retained the proximity to the lake, which is a stunning feature of this home.

Site problems had to be solved first

The site is just 0.22 acres, small by lake-lot standards. One long side borders the lake; the other borders a trail system. Our makeover plan for the site had two main objectives: maximizing lake views and access, and shielding the property from a busy public trail.

Our team worked with landscape designers to integrate the landscape and the architecture. Outdoor rooms, gardens, a waterfall, arbors, and stone walkways were created for continuity and circulation within the long, narrow lot. Modifications to existing retaining walls helped to fend off shoreline erosion. Native plants replaced invasive plants, and shrubs and small trees were planted to screen the trail. The preservation of mature trees maintained a canopy, which aids in summertime cooling and acts as a visual buffer.

A split-level Cape causes problems

Although from the exterior this house appears to have only two levels, it turns out to have four. The sloped lot hides the lower level,



WEDGED BETWEEN WALKING TRAILS AND THE WATERLINE, A SMALL SITE POSED BIG CHALLENGES

When downsizing to simplify their lives, the homeowners fell in love with a small piece of land nestled between walking trails and a lake. A neglected, outdated house occupied the site just 8 ft. from the water. The house couldn't be moved or enlarged because of zoning restrictions. An existing garage helped to create some privacy and to shield noise from the road, but the back of the house remained exposed to a heavily used public trail. Adding trees and bushes along the site's border buffered it from the trail, giving the house a more private feel and turning attention toward the spectacular lake view. Photo taken at A on site plan.



A NEW HOUSE EVOLVES INSIDE THE OLD ONE

The building permit for this project required that I keep the exterior footprint the same. So transforming the cramped, inefficient, and often dark interior spaces of the original house was especially challenging. The design strategy emerged as we identified problems and then developed solutions on each level of the house. The sum of these many alterations is literally a new house, created inside an older one.

Raising the roof gains a closet. By adding to the lower-level entry bump-out, we created a 5-ft.-deep walk-in closet off the master bedroom on the main level. The added section required a variance, but because it didn't alter the home's existing footprint or roof runoff, one was granted. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

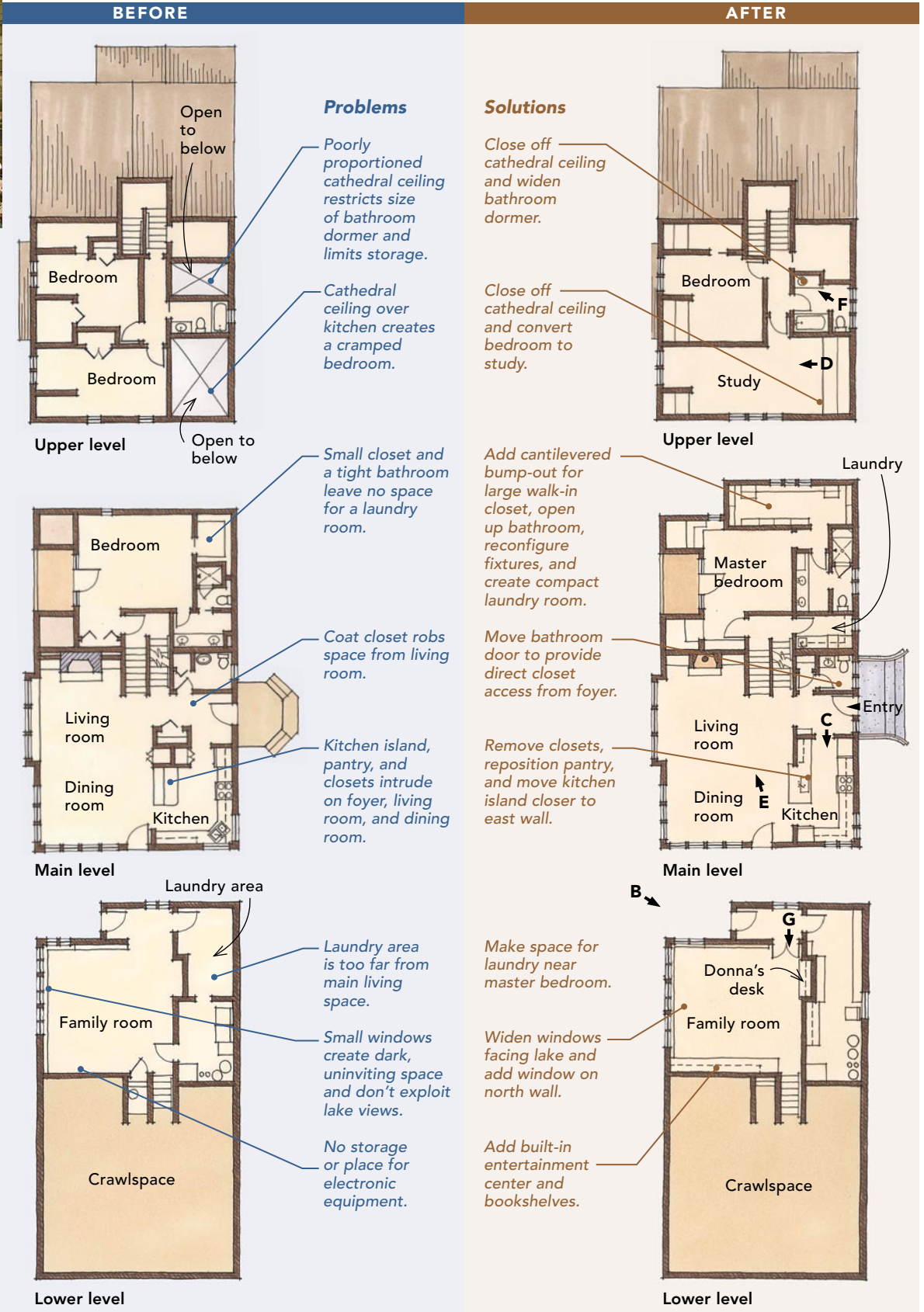
Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 4 8 12 ft.

North

SPECS

- Bedrooms:** 2
- Bathrooms:** 2½
- Size:** 2587 sq. ft.
- Cost:** N/A
- Completed:** 2004
- Location:** Greenwood, Minn.
- Architect:** McMonigal Architects, LLC
- Builder:** Kyle Hunt & Partners





Closed ceiling, open rooms

The original kitchen (left) was dark and cramped despite its cathedral ceiling. Closing it up added space for the study upstairs (photo below, taken at D on floor plan). In the new kitchen (photo above, taken at C on floor plan), removing closets and reworking sink and appliance locations helped to improve the link to the living room and to lake views.

and the main level is actually split in two. In the owners' words: "This may be the only split-level Cape Cod in existence."

Given all the levels, we started to think about the house in three dimensions. We identified oddly proportioned rooms, and small rooms with disproportionately large vaulted ceilings. Even the basement needed help. It had a large family room with a low ceiling, long beams overhead, and doors interrupting each wall: in short, a claustrophobic space.

A major feature of the house—its proximity to the lake—did not take full advantage of the views. The interior lacked natural light, and many of the rooms were cut off visually from each other and from the view.

The house was less than it seemed

Even before hiring contractor Kyle Hunt & Partners, we brought consultants and sub-

contractors through the circa-1940s house to brainstorm cause-and-solution scenarios. Some of the problems they discovered included rotting wood, a bowed foundation wall, cupped and cracked roof shingles, moss on the siding, gypsum-board cracks, rodents, and outdated mechanical equipment.

After we marked key areas, a carpenter opened up some walls, ceilings, and floors. We found moisture in wall and roof cavities, and deteriorated framing. It didn't take long to decide that the house was going to be gutted back to the framing. Our structural engineer came on site to evaluate the framing. A soils engineer reviewed soils, bearing, and lakeside-erosion issues. A roofer discovered that a layer of wood shakes had been installed on top of older shakes without replacing the flashing, which had been a major cause for their failure. A waterproofing con-



"Before" photos: Courtesy of McMonigal Architects, LLC

On the lake in your living room

Most people add window seats, but with a large window just 8 ft. from the lake, I couldn't resist the opportunity to run the windows close to the floor. New built-ins, a granite surround, and trim details transform the fireplace wall. Photos taken at E on floor plan.



Vanity under the rafters

Tucking the vanity into a nook below a rafter made room for a larger tub and more floor space in an upstairs bath. Photos taken at F on floor plan.



tractor helped to evaluate the multiple types of foundations—concrete piers, block, and poured walls—and to propose solutions.

Finding retreat spaces in a smaller house

Downsizing sounds easy until the trade-offs begin to reveal themselves. We reviewed Warren and Donna's previous house carefully to compare the scale and the use of rooms to what we were proposing in this 2600-sq.-ft. house.

Moving to a smaller house meant that privacy would change and that more spaces would need to be multipurpose. We designed a study for Warren on the second floor and a desk area for Donna on the opposite end of the house (floor plans, p. 78). Outdoor retreat spaces like the roof deck off the master bedroom also would offer some solitude.



New life for a stodgy basement



Dark-stained beams and a small window made the original basement uninviting (inset photo). In the new space, cross beams were added to create a coffered ceiling. A band of windows brings in the view, and built-in cabinetry provides an entertainment center with ample storage space. Photos taken at G on floor plan.



Noise can be an issue in smaller homes, especially when private spaces are hard to come by. To limit sound transmission, we added sound insulation in walls and ceilings, and used solid-core doors.

The house sorely lacked storage, and its modest size meant that every inch of space had to be used. We widened dormers, exploited kneewall space with built-in shelving, added deep pull-out cabinetry, and closed up two cathedral ceilings to gain room upstairs.

We also found space for a walk-in closet in the master bedroom. To gain this closet, though, we needed to create a 5-ft.-deep cantilever above the lower level.

We moved the laundry out of the basement to the main level, the same level as the master bedroom. This move freed space for more mechanicals and storage in the basement,

and put the laundry where clothes, bedding, and towels are used and stored.

Details unify the house

We used actual furniture pieces, artwork, and rugs early in the design for space planning. The details were designed to harmonize with the homeowners' furnishings and to fit the cottage style. Custom millwork profiles were proportioned carefully. We adapted interior and exterior bracket shapes from an early house that Warren and Donna had lived in.

Box beams in the main- and upper-level ceilings add character to the rooms and lower the scale of vaulted spaces. The basement family room changed from a walk-through room to a feature space with large windows, cabinetry, in-floor heat, and a coffered ceiling.

To increase daylight in all rooms and to create dramatic lake views, we added 17 new windows and enlarged 18 existing ones. Interior transom windows above a few doors bring light to the central staircase. Several bearing and nonbearing walls were moved or eliminated to gain openness for views and to increase usable space.

The drastic nature of this remodel meant that there was a lot of material to salvage. We contacted a local salvage expert, who was able to remove and reuse pretty much anything that was not deteriorated. □

Practicing in Minneapolis, architect Rosemary McMonigal credits team members Jennifer Hilla Schlag, Melissa Steinberg, Curtis Martinson, and Ashley Mitlyng for their work on this project. Photos by Phillip Mueller.