

Sweat-Equity Renovation

An 1890s bungalow is returned to its original beauty by an ambitious husband-and-wife remodeling crew

BY JOHN HAWTHORN

My wife and I married in September 2000, and by Thanksgiving, I was carrying her over the threshold of our first house, a 1901 colonial that needed a complete restoration. It took just two years to accomplish a pristine rebirth of the old house. Almost to the day of my sinking the last nail in the crown molding and hanging up my tool belt, my wife appeared, exclaiming, "I found it." While I wondered what it was that we had lost, she clarified by adding, "I found our dream home."

We live in the river community of Red Bank, N.J., so naturally, this dream home had river views going for it. That's where the good news ended. As I walked through the 1890s bungalow, my heart sank. The next several years of my life flashed before me. They would be spent in this house, gutting the walls and ceilings, rewiring, replumbing, installing a new heating and cooling system, restoring the original windows, and so on, and so on.

Five years, two children, and one dog later, we finally finished. Having more than likely saved the house from someone else's wrecking ball, we restored it to its period-authentic style while updating it to fit our lifestyle.

Four kitchens and three bedrooms

Because we sold our first house to buy the bungalow, we lived on a job site for the duration of the renovation. We had to complete one or two rooms at a time, move into the finished space, and then begin work on the next rooms. When our daughter was born, our living space was limited to one room on the first floor. The upstairs was under construction, so this single room was our living room, our bedroom, and our kitchen, all rolled into one.

If the downside to living in a gutted house is conditions that are, at times, downright uncivilized, the upside is plenty of time to try floor plans and to consider details. To gain a complete sense of the available floor space, we mocked up the kitchen using sawhorse tables for the island and surrounding counters, and used masking tape on the floor to establish the hallways and door openings.

Peeling away years of "improvements." *The outside of the house was always charming, but most of the charm was hidden beneath four layers of roofing, countless layers of paint over the 100-year-old cedar siding, and a porch that was closed in by triple-track windows.*





Hidden treasures and a wide-open feel. To keep the small kitchen from feeling cramped, the island is a comfortable distance from the rest of the cabinets, the kitchen table is tucked neatly at the foot of the stairs, and a pair of hidden built-ins (hint: look under the clock) keeps the recycling bins and some occasional-use appliances out of sight.

We walked through the house pretending we had arms full of grocery bags and considered where we would like the light switch to be located when going upstairs at bedtime. This process gave us real-life perspective.

The only two rooms that remained largely the way we found them were the living room and the dining room. In fact, the wainscoting in the dining room—covered by so many layers of paint that the trim profiles were almost completely obscured—was inspiration for the rest of the downstairs. The only change to the living room was the addition of a box-beam ceiling, which was an aesthetic solution to a structural necessity. The second floor, which had originally been an attic, was at some point converted to living space but never reinforced to carry the extra load. We added structural beams under the existing joists and dressed them up with trimwork (drawing p. 72).

To help keep the kitchen period authentic, we installed cabinetry that looked as if it could have been in the origi-

nal room. We chose tall upper cabinets with inset glass doors to establish a furniture-like feel (photo p. 73).

Rather than overload on cabinets, we set up a large pantry to store all our food, allowing the rest of the kitchen to be minimal and more efficient. We also designed and installed a hidden cabinet in the kitchen wainscot to house the microwave and toaster ovens, as well as a slide-out drawer below to hold the recycling bins. Another feature we felt strongly about, given the space allowed, was the additional prep area of 30-in.-deep kitchen countertops as opposed to the traditional 24-in. depth.

The floor plan also provided an opportunity to connect the kitchen with what used to be a bedroom. This bedroom offered the best view of the river behind the house, so we made it into a den.

To help heat the first floor in the winter and to leave open floor space for the rest of the year, we installed a sealable flue pipe in the ceiling of the den. This allows



AN AESTHETIC SOLUTION TO A STRUCTURAL NECESSITY

The second floor, which had originally been an attic, was at some point converted to living space but never reinforced to carry the extra load. To support the existing floor joists, which were beyond their maximum span, the homeowners ran new structural beams perpendicular to the joists. The new beams also provided enough room to run 6-in. HVAC ductwork and became a starting point for a classy box-beam ceiling.

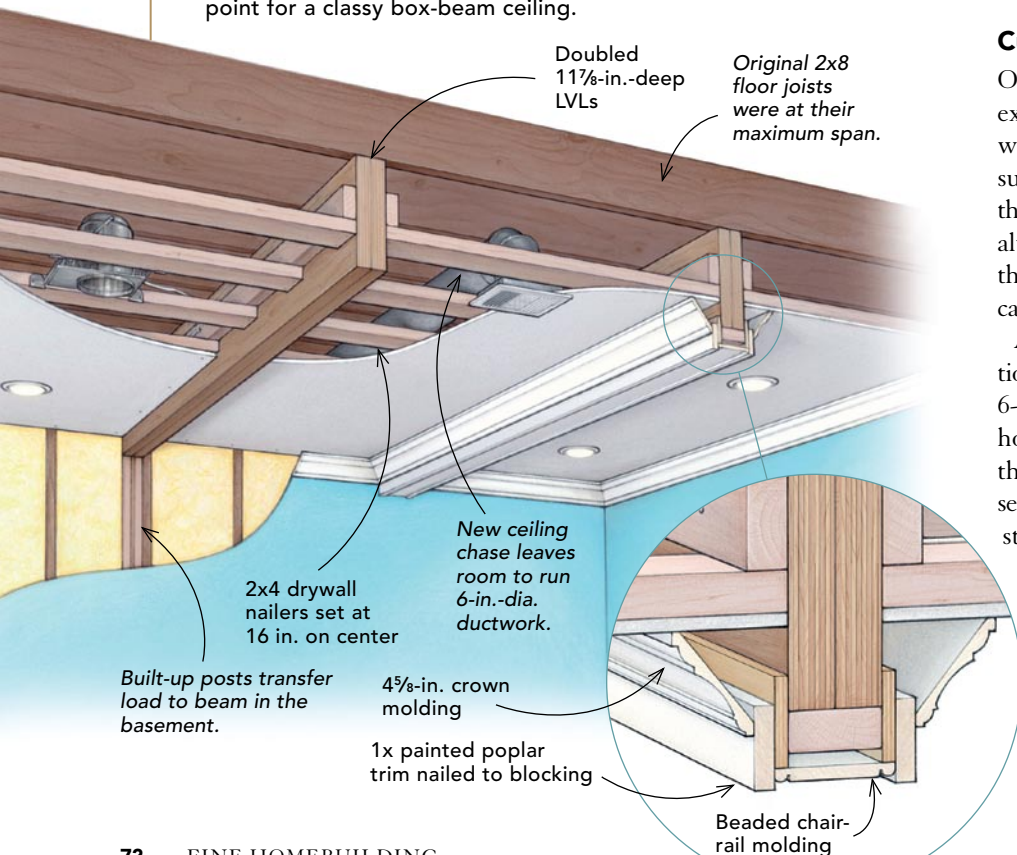
us to rearrange the furniture slightly, run a flexible duct, and hook up a woodstove in the winter. In the spring, we put the stove on a dolly and wheel it to the back deck, where it stays until winter weather returns.

Curb appeal came last

Our priority was to have a functional house first, so the exterior upgrades didn't begin until after the interior was complete. It was frustrating to have the outside in such poor shape while the interior looked so good, but the compromise was necessary. Besides, the exterior was always charming; it just needed a lot of help to maximize that charm. Just like on the interior, we did our best to capitalize on the features we had.

Any downtime we had during the interior renovation was spent in the basement restoring the 20 original 6-over-6, divided-lite double-hung windows. To us, the house was defined by these authentic windows, and the thought of replacing them with modern windows seemed like a mistake. We lived with the old triple-track storm windows for close to two years as we worked to find enough vintage blown glass to restore all the broken panes.

After tearing off three layers of asphalt shingles and one layer of cedar shakes, we replaced the roof with architectural asphalt shingles and copper valleys. Although the house also still had its original 100-year-old cedar sidewall shingles, they were coated with several layers of paint, and restoring them to their original





CREATIVE CABINETRY FOR EASIER PLUMBING

appearance was simply not possible. We decided that the best choice for the next 100 years was to replace the shingles. We love the color of new red-cedar shingles, and we wanted to retain that fresh look over the years, if possible. I found a product called TWP-500 (www.woodsealants.com) that, when applied to fresh cedar, prevents it from weathering to a silver or black color. The siding has been finished since 2007, and so far, the product has lived up to its claims.

Although we were able to remove the many layers of paint from the quartersawn Douglas-fir porch floor, we had to replace about half of the boards before refinishing. The porch columns were also beginning to show signs of rot. We decided to replace them and resaw the original columns for use as a new kitchen tabletop (photo p. 71).

The payoff was worth the pain

There were many times that we did not believe this renovation would ever be complete. The road was long, the work was grueling, and we didn't salvage and reuse as much of the old house as we had originally hoped. But as tough as our life was over those years, we lived through it all, formed a bond with our house that can't be achieved in any other way, and managed to restore the property to what we think is a period-authentic bungalow with some modern charm. □

John Hawthorn is a builder in Red Bank, N.J. Photos by Justin Fink, except where noted.

After removing the existing kitchen cabinets, the homeowners found that the load-bearing wall studs had been notched heavily to run the sink's waste pipe. After replacing the damaged studs, they sidestepped the structural problem by installing a 27-in.-deep sink cabinet flanked by standard 24-in. cabinets. Kept flush on the front face, the different-depth cabinets created a 3-in. space in the back to route the drainpipe. As a bonus, the added depth allowed for deeper countertops.

