

Double-Duty House

A new home for a young family includes two home offices under one familiar roof

BY KURT SKRUDLAND

There aren't many vacant lots in the suburbs of Chicago, so it's not uncommon for clients to ask me to evaluate a property with an existing house as the site for a new home. Often, people are willing to tear down an old house as long as the property is in the right neighborhood. Still, I work hard to find a reason to remodel. It can be something as simple as a historic trim detail, a few rooms that can remain, or the irresistible character of the exterior.

It was no different when the day came for my wife and me to move out of Chicago proper. The right neighborhood and property were more important to us than the existing home. We wanted to be within walking distance of shops and restaurants, along the train line to the city, and on a corner lot with southern exposure and a yard. Given that our requirements for the house included three bedrooms, two home offices, a social kitchen and living space, and a great outdoor connection, I assumed we'd be remodeling. But that didn't turn out to be the case.

After a couple of years of looking, we found the house you see in

the "before" photo. Unfortunately, we couldn't justify remodeling. Everything was outdated, including the appliances and mechanical systems. Every room was too small and needed extensive work. There were no details that we felt compelled to save, and early estimates showed that we would spend less by tearing down the old house and starting new.

The old house did have one thing going for it, though: It had a style we loved and fit the context of the historic neighborhood. We kept that in mind as we designed our new home.

Similar shape—that's about it

In an area where teardowns are too often replaced with homes of disproportionate scale and style for the neighborhood, we were adamant that we wouldn't do that. Working with the lines of the original house and incorporating Craftsman-style details allowed us to blend in to the neighborhood. But the long gable roof and broad shed dormer are where the similarities begin and end.

Once we established the shape and style of the house, we began to evaluate our needs for space. My wife and I both work from home, so we each





BEFORE



AFTER

LOW MAINTENANCE FROM THE GROUND UP

Actually, that's not the same house. Remodeling to match the lifestyle of a work-at-home family and to meet a reasonable level of energy efficiency proved to cost more than starting over. The author, architect Kurt Skrudland, worked with the lines of the original house to maintain the character of the established neighborhood. To strike a balance between high-quality low- or no-maintenance materials, affordable materials, and natural materials that add character to the home, Skrudland worked from the foundation to the eaves.

Cedar brackets and fir beadboard soffits add character at the eave, where they are protected by the overhanging roof.

Located high enough from the ground, the second-floor **shake-style vinyl siding** from Certain-Teed looks like the real thing.

Better looking than vinyl, more durable than wood, and somewhere between in cost, **fiber-cement siding** from James Hardie and **composite trim** from Azek are used on much of the house.

Because the house is clearly visible to neighbors and visitors, the durable, **local stone-veneer-and-limestone sill** was worth the expense.

needed an office. We wanted a master suite, a bedroom for our daughter, and a guest bedroom with its own bathroom. Both a formal entry and a functional mudroom entry were important to us, as was a casual, social living area with an adjacent outdoor space. The only way to get all this into the footprint the lot would allow meant asking most areas of the house to do double duty.

I grew up in an old house, and to this day, I watch my father work on it constantly. It is a labor of love for him, and I respect his work ethic. My wife and I, however, don't want to spend our free time working on our house, so low maintenance was a priority. Unfortunately, low-maintenance materials are not always the most affordable. We tried to use durable exterior finish materials as wisely as possible.

Finally, we considered cost, comfort, and efficiency when choosing insulation and mechanical systems. We insulated the roof and walls with closed-cell spray foam and sheathed the walls with 1 in. of extruded-polystyrene rigid-foam insulation over the exterior sheathing. Besides being thermally efficient, this insulation package yields a super-quiet house. We installed a radiant-floor heating system with Warmboard's integral subflooring. The system was expensive, but we believe it is

MAKE THE SPACE AND THE MATERIALS

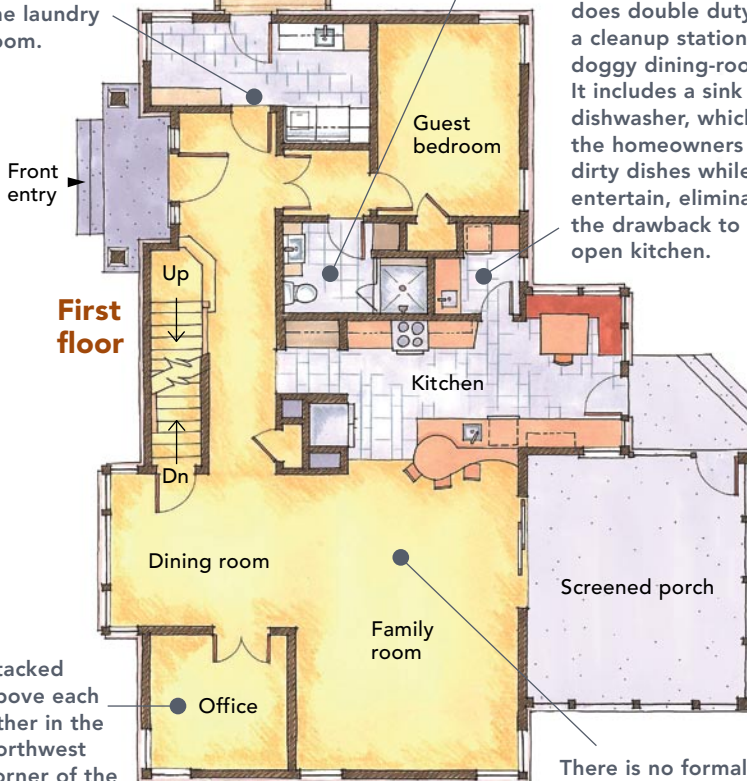
Trim details and accent materials can be a slippery slope when it comes to keeping the budget in check. To keep costs under control, the author used expensive tile and trim only where it would make the biggest impact.

The formal front entrance and the daily garage entrance share the mudroom and foyer. The mudroom is also the laundry room.

Garage entry

The full bathroom on the first floor serves regularly as a powder room. Closing the double doors in the foyer creates a private guest suite with a full bath.

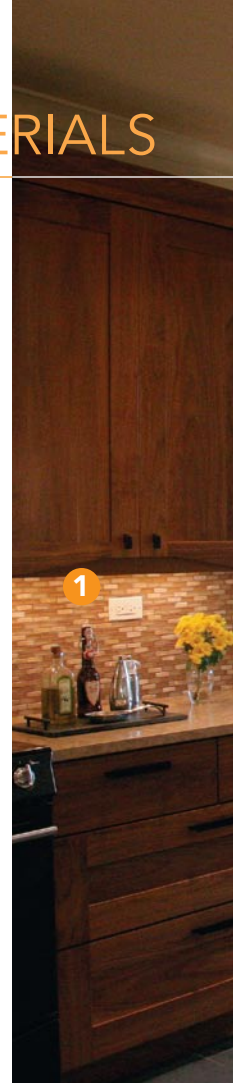
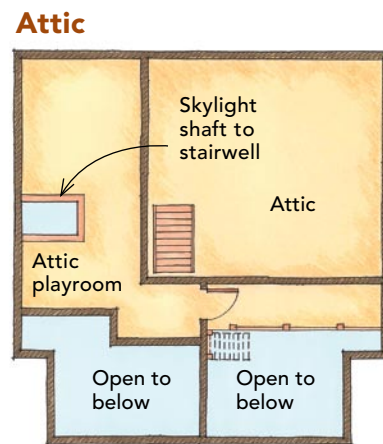
The small pantry does double duty as a cleanup station and doggy dining-room. It includes a sink and dishwasher, which allows the homeowners to hide dirty dishes while they entertain, eliminating the drawback to an open kitchen.



Stacked above each other in the northwest corner of the house, the two home offices are bright and welcoming. The first-floor office space doubles as a library, the other as an additional guest bedroom.

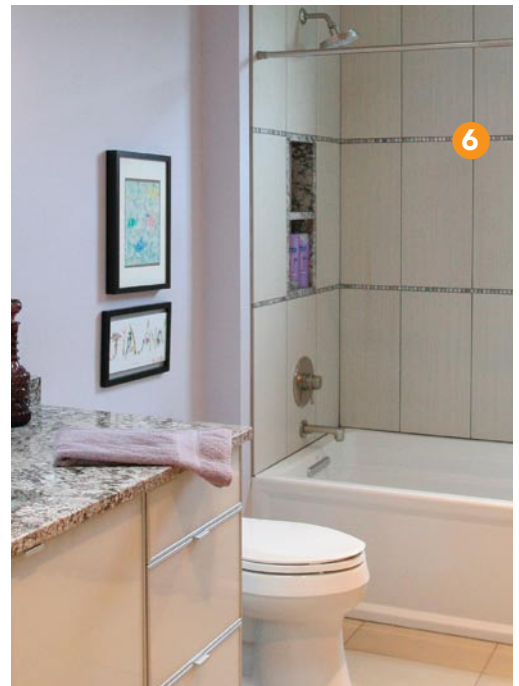
There is no formal living room. Instead, the family room can be used as swing space, allowing the dining area to expand for large groups while maintaining the individual functionality of separate rooms.

The bedroom has a balcony and attic play loft that's accessible by a library ladder. A huge hit with kids, it keeps the toy-disaster zone out of sight.



Floor-plan drawings: Martha Garstang Hill

WORK TWICE AS HARD



SPECS

Bedrooms: 3

Bathrooms: 3

Offices: 2

Size: 2900 sq. ft.

Cost: \$200 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2009

Location:
Arlington Heights, Ill.

Architect:
Kurt Skrudland,
Impact Architecture

Builder: Faley
Homes, Arlington
Heights, Ill.

1 The tiled kitchen backsplash, a “brick blend” of glass and onyx from Mosaico, faces the open living area, where it is highly visible. Cost: \$27 per sq. ft.

2 Affordable gauged-slate floor tile, available on special order from The Home Depot, has softer edges and more consistent thickness than common cleft slate. It’s also easier to clean, and you can use every tile in the box. Cost: \$3 per 16-in. tile.

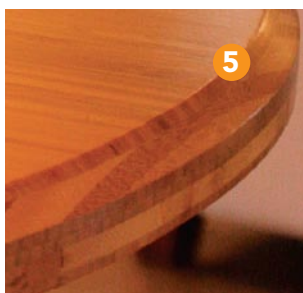
3 The look and feel of walnut doors make an impact on the first floor. Upstairs, more affordable paint-grade MDF doors have the same four-panel design. Cost difference between walnut and MDF: about \$355 per door.

4 Details like built-up crown and box-beam ceilings add character, style, and cost. Choosing to paint these details saves money on materials and labor, and lets naturally finished materials, such as the kitchen cabinets, shine.

5 After pricing a curvilinear stone bar top, the author set out to find a more affordable option. His solution was to glue together two ¾-in. sheets of carbonized Plybam plywood for the custom-shaped counter. The chamfered edge gives the counter an inlaid look for less than \$400.

6 Bands of glass tiles in the shower accent the 12-in. by 24-in. ceramic shower wall; cost: \$30 and \$5 per sq. ft., respectively. Honed-concrete and limestone floor tiles are affordable, safe, and durable in wet areas; cost: about \$10 per sq. ft.

7 By now, everyone knows the deal with Ikea cabinetry: It’s affordable, stylish, reasonably durable, and delivered to your door with little or no lead time. For these reasons, the author used Ikea cabinets for the mudroom, for the pantry, and for his daughter’s bathroom. The Amish make pretty nice cabinets, too. The fact that the Amish don’t deliver has turned into a benefit. “My clients and I take a road trip to pick up their cabinets,” Kurt Skrudland says. “They love the experience, and the quality of the work is exceptional. It becomes one of the things they remember most about building their home.”





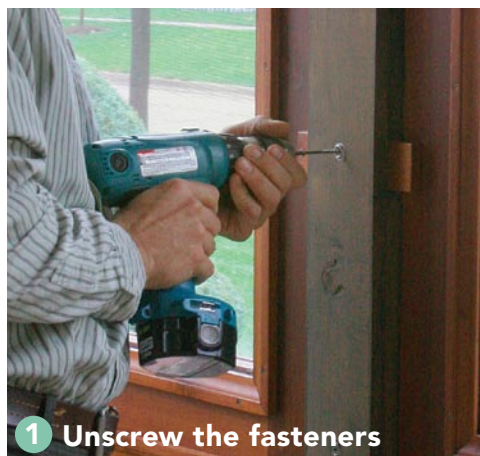
the most comfortable type of heating available. The system is also very quiet, and when you work at home on a busy street, quiet and comfort become exponentially important.

Federal and local tax incentives covered almost half of the up-front cost of our solar water-heating system, which we use for potable water. A larger array also could have provided hot water for the radiant-floor heat, but we didn't want to mount the panels on the unsightly stands that would have given them the proper angle for the winter sun. Our panels are mounted flat on the roof and blend in like large skylights. We did run conduit, however, to wire photovoltaic panels in the future. □

Kurt Skrudland is a licensed architect specializing in green residential design. Photos by Brian Pontolillo, except where noted.

Cool detail

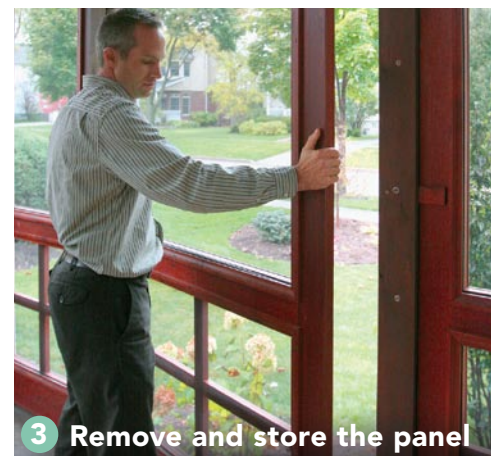
Screened porches are a luxury that can both be tricky to build and a lot of work to maintain. The roof protects the ceiling and floor fairly well, but the walls are exposed to the elements year-round. Using manufactured screen doors (ordered online through Vintage Woodworks) solves a number of these problems. Not only are removable panels easier to repair and refinish, but they also can be stored during winter months when the porch isn't being used. This system, with stops on the outside of the porch posts and sliding blocks inside, allows you to install or remove each panel in about a minute.



1 Unscrew the fasteners



2 Slide the block to one side



3 Remove and store the panel