



Labor of LOVE

Anthony Wilder updates a 1930s Chevy Chase Colonial with an eye to preserving its history

By Julie Sanders

Photography by Morgan Howarth

House hunting is a little like looking for love. Prospective homebuyers may suffer disappointment, frustration and more while searching for that elusive connection. But then there's that moment when they cross the threshold, look around and know they are home.

RENOVATION ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION: ANTHONY WILDER, project design; KARY EWALT, ASID, interior design, Anthony Wilder Design/Build, Inc., Cabin John, Maryland.



BEFORE



BEFORE



The front façade of the existing house (opposite, center) remains unchanged save for two sets of dormer windows at roof level (opposite, top). Extensive changes in back (this page) include the replacement of a ramshackle, one-story addition (opposite, bottom) with an A-frame structure that houses the den and the new master bedroom.



BEFORE

This was the feeling a couple experienced when they first walked into a charming but outdated Colonial Revival home on a tree-lined street in Chevy Chase. “We wanted an older house that we could renovate ourselves,” recalls the wife. “As soon as we walked in, we said, ‘We love this house.’”

The first step was to call Anthony Wilder, who had advised them during their search and who would be taking on the renovation when the time came. He agreed with their assessment. “It’s a typical Bethesda Colonial,” he told them. “It

has great natural light, which is the most important thing in a house, a nice yard and a wonderful street.”

After buying the property, the couple and their two young boys moved into an apartment nearby for the duration of the renovation. Wilder was given a primary directive: Update the house while safeguarding its historic character and retaining its original footprint. “We wanted to respect the house as it was built,” explains the wife. “We didn’t want it to look new, and we didn’t want a big house. We wanted it to be cozy.” She adds, “Anthony under-



The former living room (opposite, bottom) got a facelift complete with a wall of built-in bookshelves and a masculine English club-style vibe (opposite, top); the dining room (below and below, left) received a similar update. The new kitchen (above) was completely transformed from its dated original (left), with white custom cabinetry, granite countertops that resemble marble and a backsplash of white subway tile. Throughout the main level, dark-stained oak floors contrast with crisp, white trim and a restful palette of grays.





To soften the lines of the master bedroom (opposite, bottom), Wilder angled the ceiling; the room was once a second-story porch. The marble-clad bath (opposite, top) boasts a window in the shower to brighten the space. The basement playroom (top) is a far cry from the unfinished original (above).

stood. He got to know us quite well!"

Wilder concurs. "I have to imbibe the spirit of my clients' needs," he observes. "I become the client, think the way they think." In this case, his methods were particularly successful. The house received a 2012 Coty Award for Historic Renovation/Restoration—as well as *Home & Design's* Award of Excellence.

According to Wilder, the goal was to create a timeless aesthetic that would reflect the home's origins in the 1930s. He and his team gained additional space by extending its A-frame structure on the second floor. They painstakingly focused on details, tweaking existing design elements and adding new ones throughout the home to improve its functionality and aesthetic impact. "It's the little things that make a house resonate," says Wilder.

For example, the original newel post on the stairs has been replaced with a more imposing custom post that provides a graceful focal point as visitors enter the foyer. Formerly squared-off doorways

from the entry to the dining and living rooms have been widened and replaced with custom-trimmed arches to make the foyer seem larger and to integrate the public spaces. Oak floors throughout are now stained a uniform dark brown, and a palette of grays dominates the main floor.

The first stage of the plan was to overhaul the dated kitchen and makeshift den at the back of the house. The kitchen had a cramped breakfast nook and the adjoining den was poorly insulated and drafty. Wilder enclosed and insulated the den, adding built-in bookshelves and a fireplace to the comfortable new space. He removed a wall between the kitchen and breakfast area, then widened the breakfast nook by six and a half feet; it now holds a table, chairs and a built-in desk. Off the back of the kitchen, a new mudroom boasts built-in storage cupboards and a durable, herringbone-patterned brick floor that fits the home's historic style.

In the kitchen, designer Kary Ewalt helped the owners define a classic look



that suits the style and era of the house, with white custom cabinetry, marble-like granite countertops and a white subway-tile backsplash.

On the second floor, Wilder reconfigured the former master bedroom into a guest room and sitting area. A second-story porch became the new master bedroom, with a spacious, Carrara marble-clad master bath occupying the space above the mudroom. The once-unfinished third floor now includes a home office featuring dark-stained maple millwork and built-ins, another guest room and a roomy bathroom. To bring in light, Wilder installed dormer windows with exterior trim that's unobtrusively painted the color of the surrounding roof.

The final stage was completing the unfinished basement, which now houses an inviting, carpeted playroom for the kids, a finished storage area and a full bath. Low-slung pipes are concealed under dry-wall, creating an array of different ceiling heights that adds interest to the space.



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The finished third floor encompasses a guest room (this page), a home office complete with maple built-ins (opposite, top) and a spacious new bath (opposite, bottom). Prior to the renovation, the office was a sparsely furnished spare bedroom (opposite, far right).



The stairwell from the ground floor is now completely open at the top, where a wall and the door to the attic once created a circuitous, angled passageway. Both wall and door are gone, and the stairs to the third floor have been replaced with an open staircase that matches the one below. The result is a direct view from the ground floor all the way up—ending at the unexpected skylight Wilder installed on the third floor ceiling. As he explains, “It’s an old house, and old houses are full of surprises.” ❖

Photographer Morgan Howarth is based in Gainesville, Virginia.