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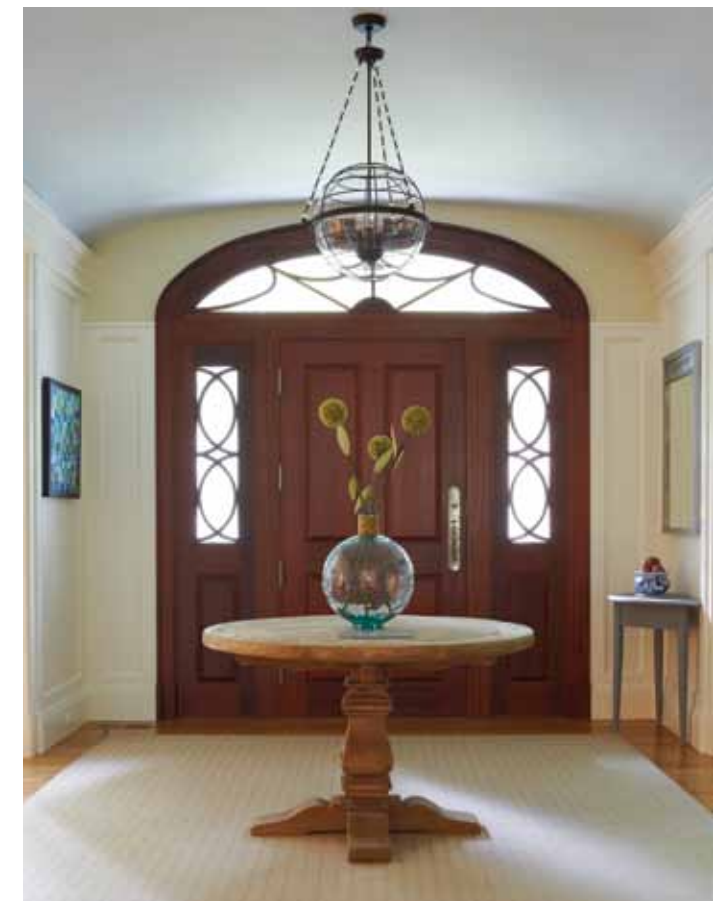
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HOME & DESIGN

KITCHENS *with Style*



Skip Sroka designed the front door complete with sidelites and transom and selected a globe-shaped fixture by Cyan Design for the foyer (opposite). In the adjacent dining room (these pages), period-style wainscoting and moldings offset an abstract canvas from the owners' collection.



PAST *perfect*

A design team creates a Shingle-style home on the site of a century-old Chevy Chase farmhouse

BY SUSAN STILES DOWELL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMOTHY BELL



The kitchen and family room (left) showcase salvaged pieces that lend flair and originality to the home. A barn door from New England (left) slides open and closed on its original track, and a pair of green entry doors found in a Paris Flea Market conceals closets. An arched passageway leading to the hall (above) is lined with wood to pick up the warm hues of the wide-plank floors.

The farmhouse was a holdover from early in the last century, haphazardly altered over many years by eight different owners to fit the needs of their families. Countless changes to the original 1907 house had taken place, and along the way an open-plan wing had been added for space and contrast. Located on an acre and a quarter in the Village of St. Martin's Additions in Chevy Chase, the old house was a stalwart survivor, even as real estate development extended beyond DC to surround it. However, in the 21st century, the dwelling entered its final metamorphosis when a couple who moved there in 1999 to start their own family finally decided to dismantle it and build something new.

The wife, a New Englander by birth who loves old things and prides herself on avoiding waste, hesitated to part with the original structure. "I grew up in an old house, so I had a hard time deciding

RENOVATION ARCHITECTURE: GEORGE MYERS, AIA, NCARB, GTM Architects, Bethesda, Maryland. INTERIOR DESIGN: SKIP SROKA, ASID, CID, Sroka Design Incorporated, Washington, DC. CONTRACTOR: JIM GIBSON, Gibson Builders, Washington, DC.



In the kitchen, divided muntins in an arched bay window inspired the grid pattern of the windows over the sink and the range's brightly tiled backsplash. A distressed diamond pattern painted on the floor and copper spotlight pendants contribute to the collected style of the home. A Dutch door keeps the dog in the mudroom.



“All the salvaged architectural elements make this house feel lived-in and deliver a warm sense of home.” —SKIP SROKA

Painted ceiling coffers reflect soft color into the family room; the mantel is made from a Pennsylvania barn beam. The husband's office (opposite, bottom) overlooks the living room, foyer and dining room (opposite, top); Sroka changed color palettes from room to room but made sure architectural elements were consistent throughout.



to take down something authentic,” she says. “But after a major renovation, the two parts of the house still didn’t work together. The rooms were unevenly heated, the dining room was tiny, the kitchen was far from the family room and we didn’t use the first floor of the modern addition.”

Rather than simply raze and discard the house, she and her husband, a private equity investment banker, opted to salvage parts of it—and of other houses as well—for their new home on the site. They composed a list of salvageable parts including a staircase and newel post, some yellow pine kitchen cabinets and leaded window frames; everything else would go to a salvage depot. “Patina is important to me,” says the wife. “You can’t reproduce on a new banister the look of wear that took a century to achieve on the original.”

United in their vision for a new old house, husband and wife brainstormed an architectural style that would suit the composition of parts they wanted and would also adapt to their lot and neighborhood. They hired George Myers of GTM Architects, interior designer Skip Sroka and builder Jim Gibson of Gibson Builders to realize their vision and create a home tailored to their family, which now includes three young children.

Myers, who founded his eponymous firm in 1989, is known for a commitment to hands-on client involvement. The program he developed for the couple was inspired by tear sheets they showed him. “The weathered-wood Shingle style of 1880s New England architecture was our inspiration,” Myers says, citing the work of Robert A. M. Stern and the stone walls and semi-circular arches

of H. H. Richardson’s earlier prototypes. The meandering nature of Myers’s interior floor plan delivered the wide house dimensions and two staircases the couple wanted. The informal whimsy of its varied millwork, wainscoting, book nooks and window seats would absorb the iconoclastic salvaged materials. The style even sat well in the village-type locale. “We engineered a geometry of the new house’s parts that reflects the volumes of the neighboring houses,” says Myers. “When the village council changed the height restrictions on new construction during our planning stage, we could comfortably lower the roofline two feet.”

Marshaling the details for the plans took more than two years. During this time, Skip Sroka was allocating rooms and helping the couple visualize what they wanted beyond the basics of “a dining room that can seat eight” or “a huge mudroom at the back door for the kids’ gear.” By the time the demolition of the original house began, the designer had already finessed a coherent look for the entire project, integrating countless details and unusual salvage elements.

“This couple was on the same page about what they wanted,” says Sroka. “They told me, ‘Show us your ideas and give us at least three choices.’” In each room, he provided alternatives for everything from doorknobs and light fixtures to color palettes and upholstery fabrics. Final selections resonated with the informal Shingle style of the house and, wherever possible, accommodated a frequent refrain from the owners: “Wouldn’t it be great to find an old piece of salvage for this door, stairway or mirror?”

From a friend in New Hampshire, the wife received a dilapi-

dated, white-painted barn door that Gibson Builders rehabilitated and Sroka’s faux painter overlaid with red paint. They hung it on its original track, where it slides between the kitchen and family room. Sroka tinkered to accommodate a range of salvaged items, using the style of the wainscoting, moldings and ceilings to bridge different looks. “The trick was to have a period reference for the introduced piece,” he explains. Sometimes the fit was easy; for instance, an old screen door pops up in the pantry, while green-painted doors from a Paris flea market occupy a proud place in the family room—a decorative element that is like adding unconventional art on a wall.

Sroka was painstaking in his efforts. In one instance, he ensured that the bathroom vanities would look aged by subtracting preservative stain from the paint finish. Carrara marble—a fixture in Shingle-style houses—had to be slightly cloudy to fit the period mood of the house. “I wanted new finishes to resonate with the worn patina of salvaged finishes,” he says. “We had to create the same feeling of durability and no fuss all through the house.”

Adorning this new old house with fresh colors, fabrics and wallpaper was the final step and a joy for Sroka. The age was right, and the rest came naturally. “My clients wanted an old house,” he says. “This was the next best thing.” ♦

Author Susan Stiles Dowell resides in Baltimore. Photographer Timothy Bell splits his time between Washington and New York.

SEE RESOURCES ON PAGE 180.



A window seat (opposite) with a semi-circular window and built-ins occupies the upstairs landing. The roomy master bath (top) boasts twin custom-built vanities topped with marble counters and medicine cabinets made from old window frames. The sons’ bedrooms flank a bathroom (above) with a trough sink made of poured concrete.