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August/September 2006
Display until September 19

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Divide and Conquer

An unusual partition defines spaces in an expanded family home and pays homage to the original structure's century-old floor plan.

WRITTEN BY FRED ALBERT PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANET MESIC-MACKIE



THIS PHOTO: Because wall space is limited in the family room, homeowners Tim and Karen Martin could afford to go bold with color, opting for a tangy shade of salmon. Leopard-print slipcovers give new life to old furniture pieces. Interior designer Michael McNamara helped the Martins select paint colors.

OPPOSITE: The Martins' son, Cal, plays video games on the family room side of the divider, which contains home entertainment equipment and storage for compact discs and tapes.



Tim and Karen Martin had barely settled into their suburban Chicago home when they started to feel the walls closing in around them. Their 1,800-square-foot house was built nearly a century ago, when formal spaces and cloistered kitchens were the norm, and bathrooms and closets could be counted on two fingers. “We really loved the neighborhood, and we didn’t want to move,” Karen says. “I just wanted a home that had really good flow to it and that felt a little bit more open and bright.”

To get the light and space they needed, the couple stripped off the back of the house and built a modestly scaled, two-story addition designed by Fred Wilson, Elissa Morgante, and Jeff Gruszka of Morgante Wilson Architects. From the outside, the addition blends seamlessly with the older structure. The challenge was to make the contemporary living spaces inside look just as harmonious.

“Tim and I enjoy cooking and entertaining, so we wanted the kitchen to be more a hub of the home,” says Karen, who also requested a casual living area where they could spend time with their son, Cal. The architects thought a separate kitchen and family room would seem too confining, while a great-room would look jarring next to the original home’s smaller spaces. So they created one large room and divided it with a freestanding cabinet. The kitchen side of



LEFT: An archway connects the kitchen with the sunny breakfast room. The kitchen side of the divider is fitted with storage cabinets for dry goods, including one reserved for Cal's favorite foods so the 8-year-old can help himself.

RIGHT: The breakfast room, wrapped in wainscoting, protrudes from the back of the house so it captures the natural light. Karen spied the teacup wallpaper in a magazine. Party supplies are stored in the archway cabinets at right.



the cabinet features cupboards for dry goods, while the family room side houses home entertainment equipment and storage drawers for tapes and compact discs. At just 6 feet tall, the cabinet stops several feet short of the ceiling, providing a visual connection between the two spaces and allowing southern light from the family room to spill into the kitchen.

The partition makes the spaces on either side feel intimate, yet still seem like part of a larger room. That's especially helpful when the Martins entertain—friends can congregate around the kitchen island or drift into the family room without feeling hemmed in by walls. A beamed ceiling spanning the two areas links them visually and echoes the Craftsman character of the original house. From the divided space, a broad archway leads to an inviting, window-lined breakfast room that protrudes from the back of the house, capturing plenty of light. The neighboring mudroom includes personalized storage cubbies where family members can shed their belongings, keeping the home clutter-free. Outside, newels that double as planters anchor the back deck, blurring the boundaries between home and garden.

On the upper level, the remodel included a new master bath. With the owners' blessing, the design team went in a modern direction, crowning the





1



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Simple Division

Room dividers can be a useful alternative to walls—especially in homes where space is at a premium. They let you split a room into separate functions while borrowing light and views from the space beyond, so neither side feels as constricted as it would with full walls. A word of caution, though: “You need to have a scale of room that’s large enough to handle the mass of the piece,” architect Fred Wilson says. He used a custom-made unit at the Martin house but says a similar effect could be achieved with off-the-shelf bookcases or cabinets, provided you have a carpenter fashion a crown or top to unify the whole.

- 1 “I love having two ovens,” says Karen, who volunteered to host Thanksgiving as soon as the Martins’ kitchen was completed. Multipane cabinet doors suit the period of the house and add depth to cabinet-lined walls. Additional storage is tucked into the archway, left, and the divider, right.
 - 2 The new mudroom contains cubbies with hooks, storage, and a bench for every family member. A pocket door closes to conceal the mess.
 - 3 The microwave oven resides in the base of the island so it’s out of sight but easily accessible for 8-year-old Cal. A pop-up vent services the cooktop when needed. The Jerusalem stone backsplash provides a craggy counterpoint to glossy granite counters.
 - 4 Jerusalem stone tiles give the backsplash warmth and texture. The tiles came affixed to a net for easy installation. Decorative brackets seem to carry the weight of the overhead cabinets and echo arched motifs used elsewhere in the room.
- RIGHT: The new kitchen was designed to look as though it could be original to the house. Cream-color cabinets were treated to a brown glaze and paired with an alder island for an unfitted look that suggests the room evolved over time. Fluted pendent lights strike a contemporary note.

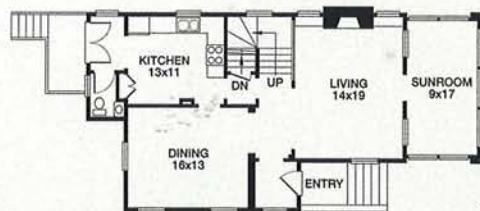




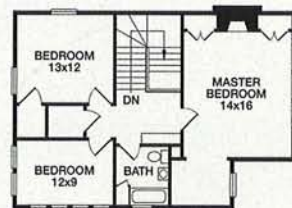


double vanity with a glowing wall of gridded glass. Windows hidden behind the glass illuminate it during the day; fluorescent tubes concealed in the backsplash keep it lit at night. The glass panel is set at an angle so the mirrors seem to dangle over the limestone counter below. "What I really like about it is that it's sort of contemporary," Karen says, "and yet it takes into account some of the Arts and Crafts elements of the house. It's nice to have surprises in your home. And I think this is a pretty good surprise."

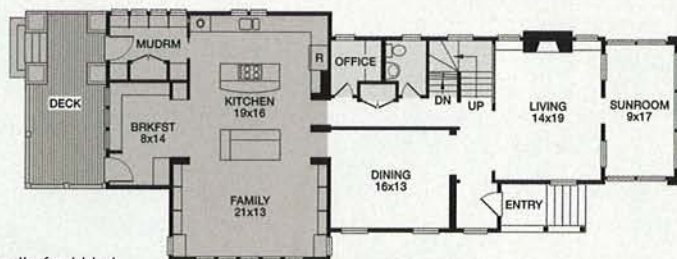
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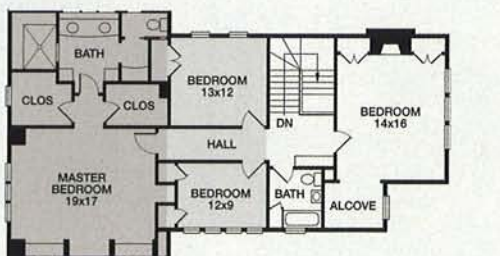
MAIN LEVEL BEFORE



UPPER LEVEL BEFORE



MAIN LEVEL AFTER



UPPER LEVEL AFTER

■ CHANGE ■ ADDITION

OPPOSITE: A glowing wall of gridded glass spans the bathroom vanity. The unit sits 6 inches from the wall behind it to diffuse light entering through the windows; fluorescent lights concealed in the backsplash illuminate the glass at night.

- 1 Glass mosaic tile adorns the shower walls beyond the vanity.
- 2 Bronze-color sinks reflect the richness of the bathroom's mahogany cabinets and provide a contrast to the limestone vanity.
- 3 The master bathroom includes a makeup table with an oval mirror echoing the ones over the vanity.
- 4 The rear addition, which acknowledges the home's traditional styling, includes a one-story bump-out containing the mudroom and breakfast room. The deck offers easy access to the outdoors and features newels inset with planters to soften the transition between interior and exterior.

The Change

A two-story addition brings enlarged family spaces, a new master suite, and light to a 1909 home without compromising the character of the original structure.

What It Took

- Building a 1,430-square-foot addition off the back that contains a kitchen, family room, breakfast room, and mudroom on the main level and a master suite above.
- Dividing the new kitchen and family room with a free-standing cabinet containing pantries on one side and home entertainment equipment on the other.
- Installing a beamed ceiling, trim, and wainscoting in the addition to reflect the original architectural detailing in the old house.
- Adding a rear deck with paneled posts that reflect the home's Craftsman character and double as planters.