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MAKING ROOM

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WITH THE ARRIVAL OF A FOURTH CHILD, A CHICAGO FAMILY'S HOME HAD TO CHANGE. ALL FORMALITY WENT OUT THE BACK AND THROUGH THE ROOF.

The Engelmans walk into their home's new entry, which features an armoirelike closet. "It's really just drywall pushed forward to emphasize the size of the dual-door storage," architect Fred Wilson says. Oak floors reflect the household's casual nature.

ike little conquerors entering a new world, children arrive, then stealthily stake their claims. During their trek to maturity, they scatter stuff to mark their territories: clothing, with the most popular article being socks, and many, many toys, especially the little plastic building blocks that are extremely painful when stepped on. So when Julie and Mike Engelman were blessed with a fourth child, common sense told them their cozy suburban kingdom—a 2,700-square-foot single-story ranch in Chicago—was in serious trouble.

Fortunately, the Engelmans knew a spatial wizard—Fred Wilson, an architect adept at conjuring new living arrangements. His wisdom comes from having his own trio of little conquerors and loving every minute of it. His secret: learning to move through life at a more informal speed of light in spaces where kids can be kids and family gatherings can be great.

The remodeling began with the reconfiguration of the first floor and the addition of 900 square feet to the rear. “Once you cross the threshold, you are literally in the family,” says the architect. The first floor flows together with no corridors or hallways to break anything up. To the right past the coat closet, a mudroom complete with a separate powder room and laundry (a dual set of stacked washer/dryers) welcomes the Engelmans’ kids and neighborhood friends from the garage or the side entry. “It’s a perfect kid mess-room,” Julie says about her favorite part of the house. Everything gets put away here before they enter the main living areas.

The Engelmans’ home (*below*) was reclad in wood siding and painted yellow. A trellis was added to pull the entry forward into the front yard, therefore de-emphasizing the garage. Gable details, flower boxes supported by brackets, and the trellis all soften the facade and impart a garden feel. In the new family room (*right*), the vaulted ceiling shows off the architect’s artistic interpretation of a working structural element—the trusses. They are kept in tension by the metal cables and turnbuckles, which keep the roof from spreading apart.







The family room is a converted screened porch—and the room that most people react to when they walk in the front door. The ceiling support system draws many “wows.” “I like it when a real structural element can be transformed into an artistic expression, yet translates back into architecture,” Wilson says. The family room is an all-encompassing space and, as such, gets lots of use. “We watch movies together here, take turns playing the piano, or just gather ’round a classic board game,” Julie says. “Here’s the funny thing,” she adds, “you know how as kids get older, they like to have a place to hang out with their friends alone? Well, we all love this room so much that we’re posturing about who’s going to get to use it.”



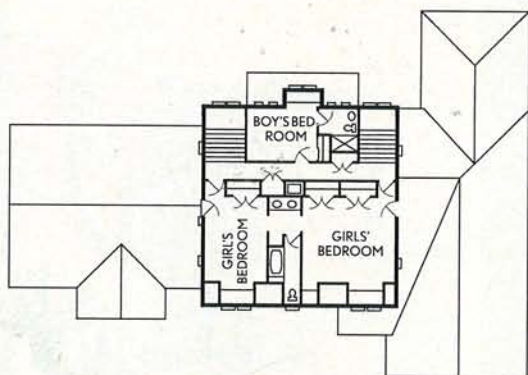
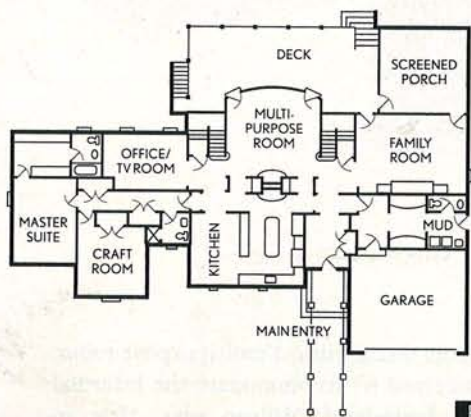


Pocket doors with glass panes (*top left*) close off both ends of the multipurpose living space, enabling different activities to occur simultaneously in the family room and the office/TV room (*not shown*). The entertainment center (*bottom left*) in the family room is a cost-saving solution. Instead of expensive built-in millwork, a cabinetmaker created the inner cabinet while the outer portion is just drywall and ledgered shelves. Square footage from an old mudroom plus a 4-foot bump-out made space for a casual dining area in the Engelmans' kitchen (*above*). New windows allow the room's sunny southern exposure to welcome Lucy and Charlie (at the table), Casey (at the counter), and Kirby (in the wicker chair) each morning for a glass of milk and mouthfuls of teasing.



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FRED WILSON



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The kitchen was gutted, appliances were repositioned, and a new central island was added to improve functionality and traffic flow. The refrigerator has a fun chalkboard front, where family members can be artistic or leave messages. Julie and Mike selected beadboard-front maple cabinetry painted white to contrast with black soapstone countertops. Crown molding above and the brackets underneath the glass-front cabinets are additional details. But the real highlight of the Engelmans' kitchen is the 1941 Roper stove. The old girl is original to the house and was the only appliance retained. Julie fell in love with it and convinced Mike to have it refurbished. "It's gigantic," Julie says, "it has six burners, two ovens, and two broilers. It's like an excellent old car."



The family room merges into a multipurpose room, which was conceived to accommodate the informal lifestyle of the household. Wilson says, "It's an architecturally arresting space that most nights is home to four comfy chairs and kids reading books in them ... but on other nights can seat 20 people for dinner on a moment's notice." For that matter, the room is kept purposely spare so transformations can occur immediately, depending on the activities of the family. Wilson created the area by bumping out the back of the house 5 feet and adding a curved wall of glazing to welcome sunshine and reveal the beautiful backyard. "It's a special room where their memories will be made," says the architect. Opposite the windows, a centralized dual-hearth fireplace adds cozy warmth to both the multipurpose room and the adjacent kitchen. "You can see through the flames and get a glimpse of what's happening around the kitchen island," Julie says.

The position of the kitchen was important to Julie and Mike. It had to be on the southern exposure, facing the street. Although most people want their more-formal living areas there, the Engelmans felt that the entire neighborhood happens in the front of the house. "Like ourselves, our neighbors are front yard people and enjoy gathering to catch up on life," Julie says. The backyard is where the kids play alone. Wilson was able to provide the kitchen with more space by incorporating square footage from an old mudroom and bumping out the now-windowed corner of the kitchen nearly 4 feet.

The girls share a bathroom (*top left*) in between the front bedrooms. "This is a knockoff of a much more expensive cabinet piece I'd seen and loved," Julie says. She likes the look of open storage and finds that it even works well with the girls' things. A true entrance for active kids, the mudroom (*bottom left*) features natural Douglas fir beadboard walls, painted birch plywood shelves, and painted poplar trim. The oak bench is bowed to soften the room's wears-like-iron appeal. Lucy (*right*), the oldest Engelman youngster, enjoys private time in her bedroom tucked in the sunny eaves.





Moving upstairs, the home's original one-story ranch-style floor plan was integrated with a new 1,250-foot addition. On the exterior, Wilson suggested lowering the addition's roofline and pulling the dormers down to prevent a stacked look. On the interior, the second floor features cozy sleeping nooks and storage cubbies for the Engelman kids. Charlie, age 8, has his own bedroom with a desk skillfully built into a bumped-out back dormer. Lucy, age 13, also has her own room. Her bed is tucked into a front dormer under a strand of bright red Japanese paper lanterns. Her books and favorite things are put away neatly in recessed drywall shelves located in the knee walls. Casey, age 12, and Kirby, age 10, share the other front bedroom.



"I do think that the kids get a huge poetic quality out of the dormers," Wilson says. "They're fun, secretlike places. And the kids all have something nestled into each of them." ☺

The transformation of the multipurpose room from living to formal dining is a ritual the Engelman family enjoys together. With excited anticipation of guests, Kirby directs Charlie and mom (*top right*) to center the kitchen table perfectly between the fireplace and the wall of windows. The kitchen chairs (*center right*) come in too, plus "some really cool folding chairs that store away in the closet," Julie says. The table (*top left*) has convenient self-storing leaves, which Casey and Julie easily maneuver into place. Casey (*right*) helps mom with the finishing touches on the cheerful place settings.



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