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# Remodeling

## Ideas for Your Home

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February/March 2004  
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A photograph of a house's front entrance. The entrance features a wooden arched door with a wreath, flanked by stone pillars and white columns. An American flag is on the left, and a mailbox is on the wall. The text 'Finding the' is overlaid in yellow and orange.

Finding  
the

charm

Thoughtful details draw out this home's hidden character while accommodating a family of six.

**opposite:** Framing an entry that offers an inviting first impression, stone piers team with classic white columns. The barrel-vault ceiling, covered with beaded board, echoes the arched front door.

**this photo:** Open to both the family room and breakfast area, the new compact kitchen features an efficient work zone.





# Fine wines may improve with age, but only if they receive the proper handling.

Houses need the same careful attention in order to age well. The 1915 home that Ann and Jeff Mathis bought in Wilmette, Illinois, lacked such care. Instead, it had suffered through two "remuddlings" by the time the couple and their four children moved in.

The worst abuses had occurred at the top and back of the home. At some point, a shallow-pitch gable was plopped onto the attic, where it loomed like an ugly hat. In the '70s, an even flatter addition was tacked on—this one a single-story box with a cramped family room and an awkward mudroom. Even from the curb, the stucco house looked plain, with aluminum storm windows covering the original double-hung units.

Yet, Ann says, "it still had some character. We liked its deep eaves, the arched front door, the high ceilings, and deep moldings." The couple also appreciated the home's setting on a quaint brick street and its three bedrooms. "We knew the house needed work when we bought it," Ann says, "but we weren't intimidated. We'd done a lot of

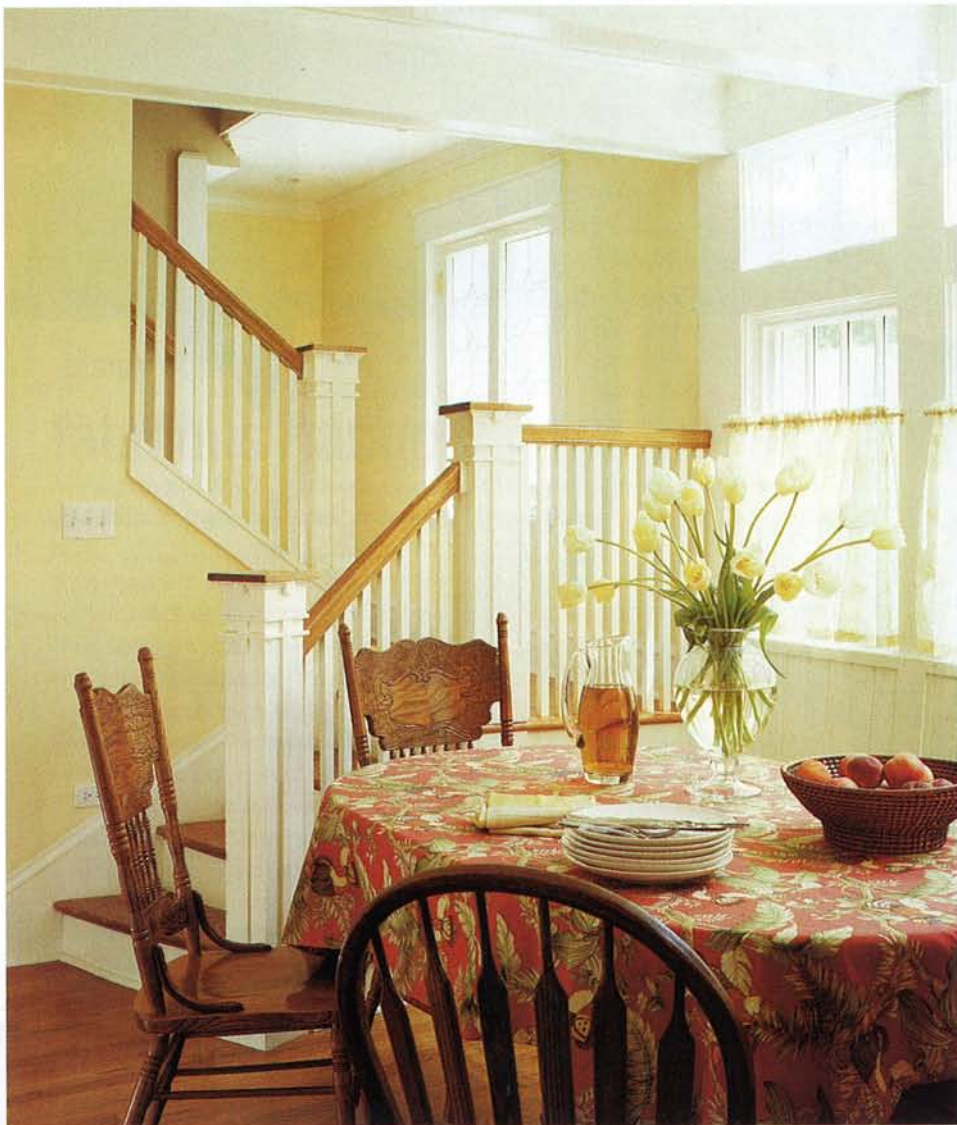


before

**opposite:** Cherry cabinets with metal pulls and seeded-glass doors give the kitchen period flavor. Soaring to nearly 9 feet high, the transom and window overlook the backyard.

**left:** Created from original kitchen space, the sunny breakfast room features a built-in bench beneath a bank of east windows.

**above:** New windows, a front porch, and refinements such as horizontal banding and bracketed eaves give this formerly drab 1915 home its Craftsman-inspired elegance. Lichen-hue paint revives the existing stucco.



**this photo:** Each family member has a cubby in the slate-floor mudroom. A cutout above the curved center bench borrows light and a view from the adjacent stairwell, which leads to a finished basement.

**opposite top:** The spacious new family room is a perfect spot for the Mathis girls to read, compare notes, or play games. Cherry built-ins flank the family room fireplace, emphasizing the slate hearth. The cabinetry's angled design also turns the TV (hidden in a cabinet on the left) toward the seating area.

**opposite middle:** Detailing on the family room cabinets repeats a pattern from the windows directly overhead. Pilasters cleverly conceal CDs.

**opposite bottom:** To the right of the fireplace, a matching cabinet stows games, DVDs, and videos.





## FAMILY ROOMS

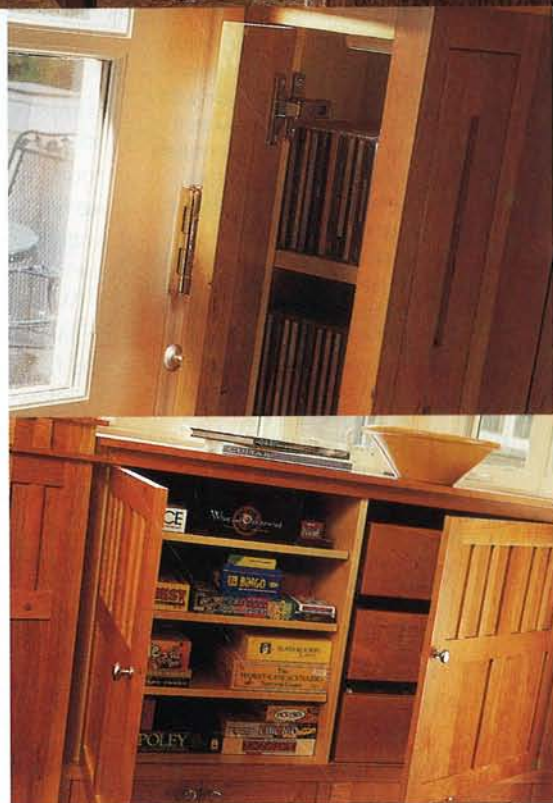
# fabulous hangouts

As you plan your new family room, consider these tips for a successful project.

**1 Handle kitchen connections carefully.** "A clear sense of separation makes the family room a much softer, warmer space," architect Fred Wilson says. Even in a great-room with an open kitchen, it's important to visually delineate each area with elements such as archways, short half-walls, columns, or changes in ceiling height. "Our clients are leaning away from the great-room and offsetting the two areas a little more," Wilson adds. "It's not always wonderful to watch TV while someone else is trying to talk or cook dinner nearby."

**2 Carefully plan for furniture.** Start thinking about how you'll live in the space before remodeling to ensure that everything you want fits comfortably and that traffic flows smoothly. "You don't want people walking through the middle of the room all the time," Wilson says. "The family room should feel like a destination, not a hallway." A furniture plan also determines where electrical and cable outlets belong—costly elements to change once the room is complete.

**3 Bring in ample natural light.** The ideal window arrangement includes at least two exposures for even lighting throughout the day. If a view is unpleasant or you need more wall space, consider a skylight or transom window. As a rule, the higher the window, the deeper the light's penetration into the room.





**above left:** The new master bedroom includes its own wood-burning fireplace with a raised hearth that makes it easier to see glowing embers from the bed. During the summer, the firebox houses potted plants.

**above right:** With a separate shower around the corner, this luxurious whirlpool stretches out in style. Gray-green walls and quartersawn oak paneling recall popular details from the Arts and Crafts Era.

**opposite:** In the neatly compartmentalized master bath, each area is defined by handsome oak columns and a graceful arch. A semiprivate toilet niche lies just beyond the marble-top vanity.



[home improvement projects] ourselves when we were first married."

This time, however, they weren't planning a do-it-yourself makeover. The Mathises wanted to enhance their home's vintage style while making it work for a family of six. Besides a spruce-up, their wish list included a new master suite, a larger family room, and an updated kitchen. For help, they contacted architect Fred Wilson, who agreed with the Mathises' assessment. "The house had Craftsman elements, but there was no refinement," Wilson says. "It did have good bones, though. We felt there was enough style to latch onto and embellish, and then carry throughout the house."

Wilson's exterior changes were largely cosmetic, but the results are dramatic. Today a handsome porch with crisp-white columns and flared stone piers stretches across the front of the house. The ugly aluminum windows have vanished, replaced by new windows with Craftsman-inspired details. Slender white brackets and richly stained wood paneling adorn the deep eaves, while mossy-green paint brightens the walls.

Inside, Wilson began by fixing the flawed layout. Off came the old family room, mudroom, and a small half-bath (all perched on a concrete slab). In their place, a larger two-story addition with a full basement arose. On the main level, an open kitchen with a granite-top island now overlooks a family room with a slate-clad fireplace. A smaller, single-level addition includes a narrow slate-floor mudroom and powder room. Upstairs, a hall that once dead-ended in a closet now opens to a 480-square-foot master suite with a second hearth. A vaulted vestibule separates the suite from the rest of the upper level, adding drama and a greater sense of privacy.

At 10x15 feet, the new kitchen is compact but highly efficient, thanks to ample







counter space and a layout that prevents bottlenecks. "I've found that a small work zone really works best, even with six people," Ann says.

On sunny mornings, the family's favorite new space is the breakfast room conjured from the original kitchen. It features a beamed ceiling and a bank of tall eastern windows. By extending a small bump-out, Wilson created space for a roomy L-shape banquette. "In our old kitchen, the built-in booth only seated four, so we couldn't all sit down at once," Ann recalls.

Inside or out, the remodeling isn't a literal interpretation of Craftsman style, Wilson notes. "It's a blend between eras, but all the styling is in the correct proportion and scale for the house," he says. "A lot of homes being done today have giant spaces, but they're not nice to be in—they aren't well thought-out or embellished in any way."

In the Mathis house, thoughtful embellishments are easy to find. Examples in the kitchen include transom windows above the sink, plus two sets tucked behind upper cabinets, which admit morning light while preserving much-needed storage space.

Today passersby might find it hard to recognize the house, yet everything looks as if it's always been there. That's exactly the effect Wilson and the Mathises intended.

"Before, the house was disjointed," Ann says. "Now it feels whole." **RI**

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## the change

Fixed a clumsy, ill-suited room arrangement at the back of the house and built on subtle Craftsman styling original to the 1915 home.

## what it took

- Tore off the small front stoop and added a broad porch with Craftsman styling.
- Demolished the old family room and mudroom, replacing it with a kitchen and family room addition topped by a spacious master suite.
- Centered a smaller one-story addition at the back of the house, creating a new mudroom, powder room, and basement stairway.
- Extended a bump-out on the home's side to hold the breakfast room's banquette and expand an upper-level bath.
- Gave the house an attic-to-basement spruce-up with new windows and trim, plus exterior details such as curved brackets in the eaves.



**opposite:** Well-planned storage compartments and clever wire-management systems hide the high-tech heart of the larger of two main-level offices. Though it looks built-in, the desk is a freestanding unit made of quartersawn oak.

**below:** A flip-up pocket door conceals the printer garage, which includes shelves for paper and notebooks.

**bottom:** The CPU slides out for easy access near the desk.

