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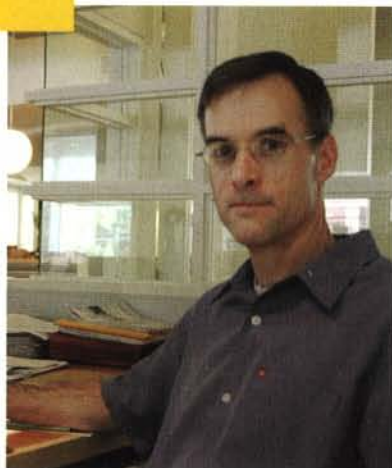
Volume 16, Number 1



The storage, work surface, prep sink, seating, and built-in microwave make this new central island a hard worker. And it's a stunner, topped with wenge wood.

A modern approach to function, finished with a vintage blend of materials, gives a grand 1920s home the kitchen it always deserved.

Timeless



DAVID ERNST
Architect

Despite poor traffic flow, isolation from the rest of the house, and a lack of natural light and storage, this Chicago-area kitchen had one saving grace—size. David Ernst of Morgante Wilson Architects explains how a cohesive, functioning kitchen emerged from a disjointed string of spaces.

The Wish List

Two key items on the homeowners' list were better circulation and more storage. They also wanted to include an eat-in area so the person cooking could be part of family functions. We wanted to create an open, airy space that would incorporate the changes and fit into the simple, elegant aesthetic of the existing home.

Making Space

Opening up the old pantry created enough floor space to add an island with a second sink. Building the microwave into the end of the island kept that appliance from eating up space elsewhere. And removing a large door between the breakfast area and the dining room improved the flow from room to room. These changes created the desired open, connected feeling.

Storage

We had some interesting opportunities for adding storage. Mahogany-encased columns and an archway separate the kitchen from the breakfast area. By adding glass-front cabinets to the columns, we created the feel of a butler's pantry. It's an interesting transition space that adds storage. We


Timeless



Drawer and cabinet pulls are appropriately scaled to their tasks.

What's Fresh





*Oversize crown molding
creates a smooth
transition from wall
to ceiling.*

What's Fresh

*A palette of durable
materials—granite, tile,
stainless, and wood—
are tough and beautiful.*

What's Fresh

*The granite countertop
colors resonate with the
oak flooring and wenge
wood island top.*

What's Fresh

THIS PHOTO By adding glass-front mahogany cabinets to the base of an archway at the entrance to the kitchen, they added beautiful storage with the feel of a butler's pantry.



used glass fronts on some of the upper cabinets, as well. We got rid of the bulky soffit and put in tall upper cabinets; the glass fronts reduce the heavy feeling of such large cabinets. Another storage option was adding drawers underneath benches of the breakfast area. The homeowners' two small children can stash toys and art materials there.

Materials

Incorporating a mix of materials really made this kitchen interesting. The granite and wenge countertops contrast with the custom white painted-wood cabinetry. The glass-tile backsplash and leaded-glass doors in the upper cabinets add a reflective quality. And the rich tones from the mahogany cabinets, natural wood beaded-board ceiling, and wood floors add warmth.





OPPOSITE LEFT A gentle arch defines the nook for the breakfast area.
OPPOSITE RIGHT The well-detailed crown molding mimics that found in the living room. The beaded-board ceiling matches the ceiling in an attached porch.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM At the end of the island, a microwave with a drop-down door is both convenient and out of the way.

LEFT New, larger windows over the sink bring in much-needed light that reflects off polished granite countertops.

BELOW Matching mahogany cabinets flank the entrance to the kitchen. They create the look of a butler's pantry. An arch echoes the one to the breakfast area.

BELOW LEFT Leaded-glass cabinet doors display dishware and give the kitchen a sense of history.

BOTTOM LEFT The bronze of the cabinet hardware recalls the finish on the light fixture bases, and the hardware's silver undertone relates to the faucets and stainless appliances.



Mahogany cabinets are positioned to appear as supporting columns in this transitional area.

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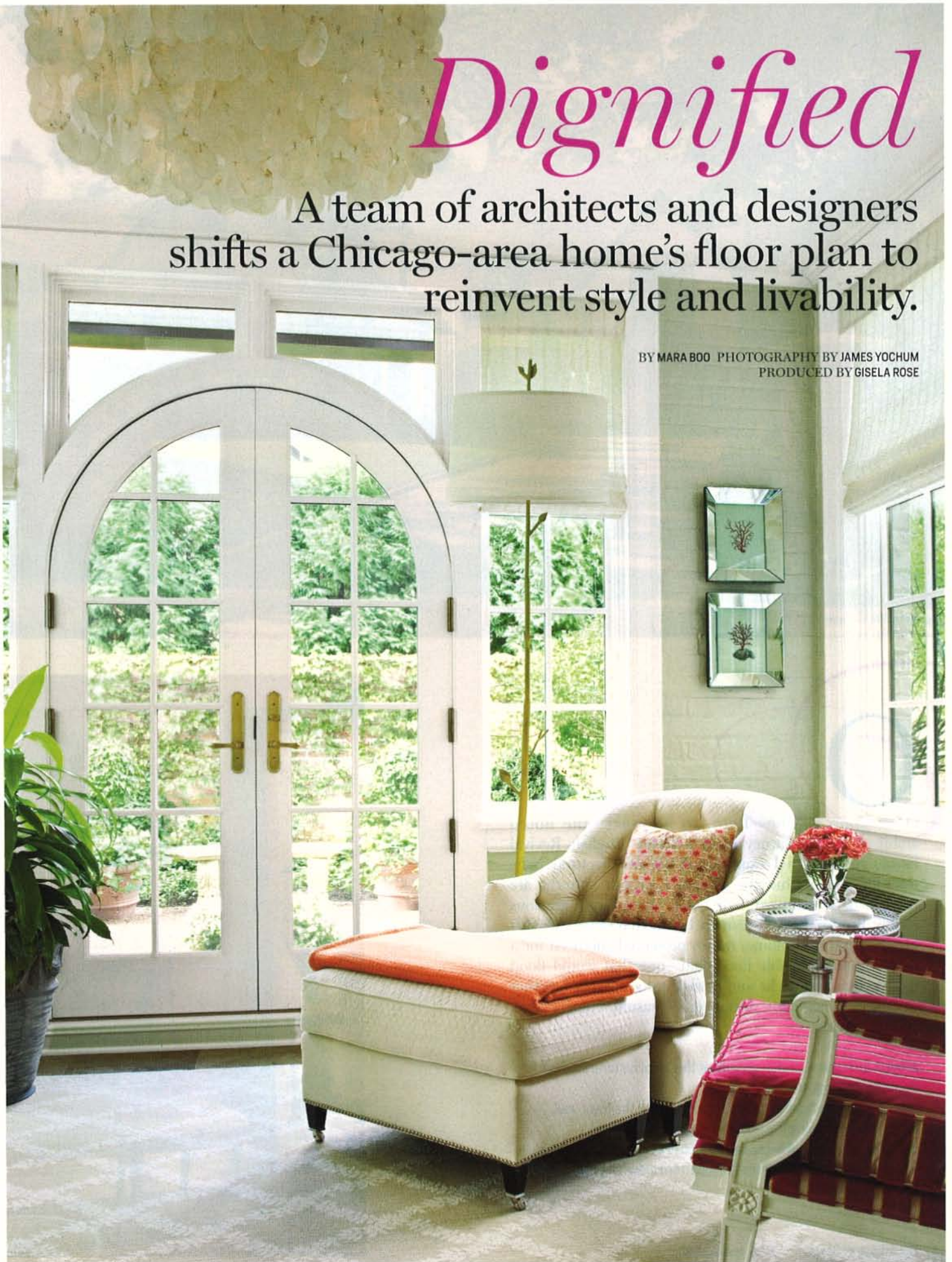
THIS PHOTO An intimate outdoor courtyard connects architecture and nature.

OPPOSITE Two fabrics—chartreuse vinyl and cotton duck—upholster the could-have-been-stuffy reading chair in the enclosed sunporch.

Dignified

A team of architects and designers shifts a Chicago-area home's floor plan to reinvent style and livability.

BY MARA BOO PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES YOCHUM
PRODUCED BY GISELA ROSE





Once upon a time—1923, to be exact—the noted architect R. W. Varney built a lovely English Revival home. A celebrated example of the architectural richness for which Chicago's elegant lakefront suburbs are renowned, it featured storybook charm and gracious rooms. But for the 21st-century family that today calls this historic landmark home, it also presented the need for a more modern, flexible floor plan—one that would flood its interiors with light and gather its occupants together in spaces specifically designed for casual, comfortable, everyday living.

ABOVE A lush green garden separates this local historic landmark from the winding, tree-lined street.

RIGHT An oversize, custom mirror leans against the foyer wall, instantly proclaiming the home's relaxed atmosphere.

OPPOSITE A cedar-shake-topped portico is a hallmark of English Revival architecture, as is the brick pattern crowning the dramatic upper-level window.





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Like all good stories, this tale of transformation is distinguished by multiple characters, surprising plot twists, and ultimately, a happy ending. Chapter One: The owners and their two young children move into the house. Chapter Two: They engage an architect to reconfigure upper-level bedrooms, renovate bathrooms, and erect a carriage house-style garage. Chapter Three: They hire interior design partners James Dolenc and Thomas Riker. "Once the house was done from a construction standpoint and we finished with the interiors, it was perfect," Dolenc says.

And then the telephone rang, heralding Chapter Four. "We couldn't believe it," Riker says, recalling the day, nearly three years later, when their clients announced they wanted to build an addition. "Out of nowhere, it became a brand-new project." At the top of the owners' wish list: a

family room to enjoy with their now-teenage kids, an eat-in kitchen, and convenient access to their backyard. The only problem was that local building restrictions would not allow the home to grow by even an inch.

It was a plot twist indeed, as architect Fred Wilson, who joined the team, explains. "The clients wanted to

ABOVE Deep jewel tones accent the sunny living room. "Even though there are some big, heavy pieces in here, such as the tufted ottomans, they're covered in fun, modern fabrics," interior designer Thomas Riker says.

OPPOSITE An antique etched-glass mirror and chartreuse vinyl sofa mingle easily in the sunporch. "This room gets used a lot for entertaining, so we made sure the fabrics are washable," interior designer James Dolenc says.

White walls and window coverings are sleek foils for colorful objects and furnishings.

What's Fresh





add rooms, but the whole challenge was that we had to work within the existing footprint. We had nowhere to go. Instead we had to come up with clever ways to borrow space. I really don't think they thought we'd be able to figure it out." But as wise characters in difficult situations often do, Wilson devised an ingenious plan to flip existing rooms and repurpose them to gain the extra living areas his clients desired. He traded the spacious dining room for a new family room, butler's pantry, and mudroom; transformed the old kitchen into a dining room; then gutted the home's original 1923 garage to create a kitchen and breakfast room. Problem solved.

ABOVE Furnished entirely with family heirlooms, the dining room is a departure from the rest of the house. "Everything else is light and bright. We wanted this room to feel more clubby and cozy," Dolenc says.

OPPOSITE The family room's bay window pulls in abundant light, which speaks to the kick-back atmosphere. The stone fireplace mantel and oval windows were custom built.



Interior designers Thomas Riker, left, and James Dolenc own an interior design firm in downtown Chicago. They recognize that even the most traditional homes can comfortably embody a contemporary sensibility. That's certainly the case in this home, which straddles the boundary between casual and formal. When approaching a renovation such as this, they recommend keeping these considerations in mind:

Remember that white is your friend. A neutral backdrop enhances anything you place against it.

It's modern to switch things up from room to room. We employed a different design aesthetic in nearly every room, but we kept the color palette consistent.

If you love a particular color, use it in different ways throughout your house. We used a hot shade of red in the sunporch and a jewel-tone version in the living room.

That said, don't be a slave to a plan. While every other room wears shades of red and green, the dining room is dressed in deep, dramatic peacock blue just because we all loved it.

It takes only one or two contemporary furniture pieces to completely alter the mood of an otherwise traditionally furnished room.

Pick fabrics that can withstand a little wear and tear. Feeling relaxed is the most modern way we know for you to enjoy your own home.

“We could have easily made this house dark and stuffy,
but we wanted to make it light and airy.

That’s what makes it fresh.”

Designer James Dolenc



Intentionally distressing materials such as wood floors lends a timeworn feel to a room.

What's Fresh



The new layout permits easy access to the outdoor living area, thanks to gloriously endowed French doors flanking the breakfast room. They are among the many windows Wilson specified to welcome natural light throughout the house, including delicate ovals flanking the new family room fireplace. "Nothing compares to natural light in terms of making rooms feel comfortable and welcoming," he says.

To enhance its easy elegance, Dolenc and Riker brought in clean-lined versions of traditionally styled furniture, made all the more current with candylike pops of color. "The owner has a real spark to her that we tried to incorporate in every room. She also loves, loves, loves red and green," Dolenc says. "So instead of the dark, heavy tones you might expect to see in a house like this, we used punchier versions ranging from chartreuse and grass to pink and raspberry. The colors are very 'her,' and they make

ABOVE In the kitchen, glazed cabinetry and putty-color granite counters and subway tiles suffuse the room with subtle elegance.

RIGHT Furniture-style pieces such as this refrigerator armoire—crafted from ebonized walnut and antiqued mirror—honor the kitchen's timeless appeal.

OPPOSITE Copper plumbing tubing is cleverly painted and wound around wood columns in the breakfast area. "It was the only way to get the kind of curve we were after," architect Fred Wilson says.







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the house light and fresh.” The happy hues float against milky backgrounds of pure white and cream and combine with streaks of silvered, gilded, and mirrored furnishings and accessories to imbue every room with playful spirit and relaxed ambience.

Indeed, the airy decor infuses the home with a modern sensibility. Furthermore, it enhances the architectural embellishments Wilson composed throughout the newly reconfigured rooms to, as he says, “bring them up to par with the great design of the rest of the house.”

Paneled walls and a carved-limestone fireplace, for example, grace the new family room with “always been there” pedigree. Likewise, hand-distressed mahogany floors, mitered with walnut inlays, confer age and character commensurate with the home’s original features, blurring the distinction between old spaces and new.

Of course, the success of any renovation rests on the combined talents of those involved. In this case, the final chapter is definitive.

“This house was a very big team effort,” Wilson says, “and you can see there wasn’t a lot of push and pull. The architecture doesn’t dominate the interiors, and the interiors don’t dominate the architecture. Everyone was willing to yield to a good idea, regardless of whose idea it was. That’s what really makes the house sing.”

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Voice of Experience

Details count, yes, but as architect Fred Wilson explains, choosing an appropriate level of detail is key to establishing a room’s purpose and identity. In the family room, for instance, typically formal elements such as a paneled wall and carved-limestone fireplace receive casual updates “thanks to a coat of paint and a determination not to carve the fireplace too heavily.” Furthermore, he says, “We could have put French doors in here, but we skipped them to ensure the clients could actually furnish the room.” Conversely, the lacy pattern adorning the breakfast room windows is showcased in the extreme. “The whole point here was to set this room apart as a little jewel box, so we went all-out to make it special.”

ABOVE A chunky copper chimney caps the stone fireplace, a focal point of the outdoor seating area. Morgante Wilson Architects and a local metal fabricator collaborated on the design. Colorful cushions complete the relaxed feel of the outdoor living room that echoes the contemporary aspects of the interiors.

PAGES 54-55 Wilson describes the house “a collage of shapes that all nest together.” French doors lead from the breakfast room to a bluestone terrace, a favorite spot for casual dining.

The Plans, Before & After

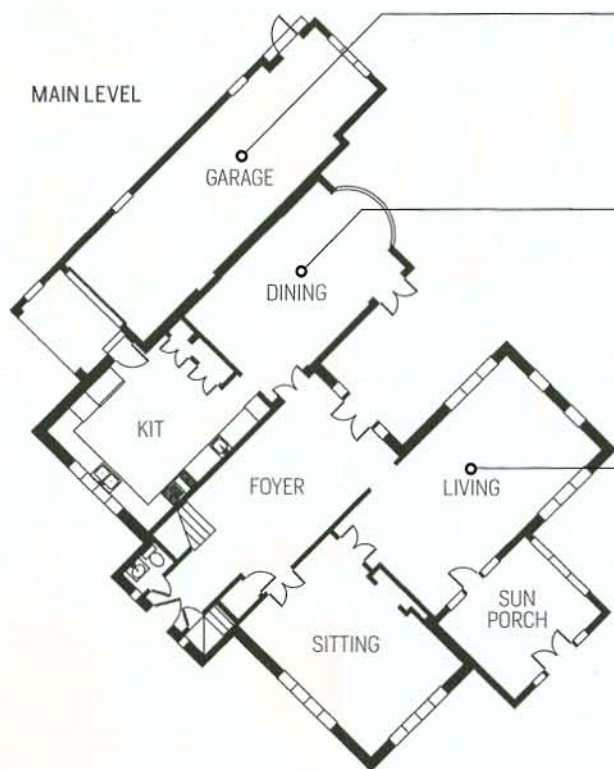
Local regulations restricted expanding this home's footprint. To add space, the homeowners had to borrow from the attached garage and rearrange some of the existing rooms.

BEFORE

Garage space was targeted for the new kitchen.

The position of this formal dining seemed more appropriate as a family room.

The living room and other spaces in this half of the main level didn't change positions, but the interior design improved livability.



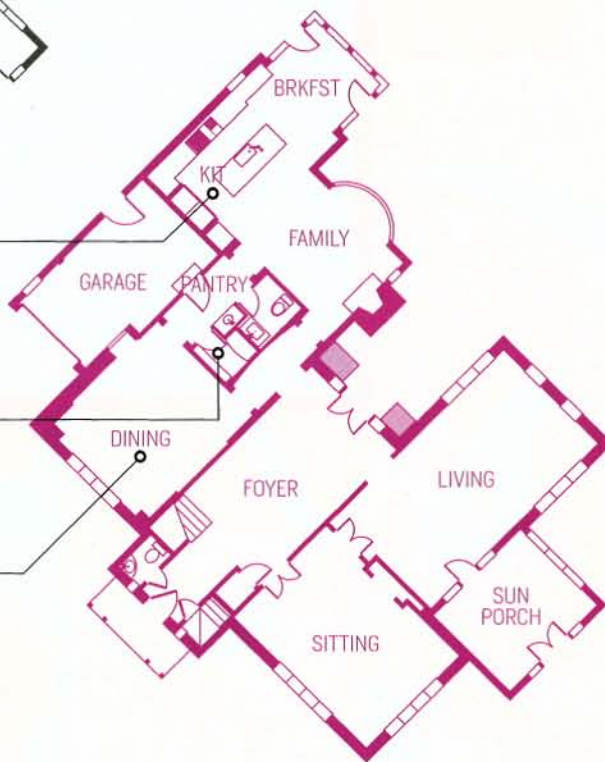
AFTER

The new kitchen and breakfast area open to the less-formal backyard and the adjacent family room.

This mudroom is opposite a powder room. Both are accessed via the butler's pantry.

The new dining room now faces the more-formal front yard. It maintains access to the kitchen through the butler's pantry.

MAIN LEVEL



5,500 square feet (including upper level, not shown here)

ARCHITECT (PHASE ONE) H. GARY FRANK ARCHITECTS ARCHITECT (PHASE TWO) FRED WILSON
INTERIOR DESIGNERS JAMES DOLENC, THOMAS RIKER LANDSCAPE DESIGNER SARA FURLAN