

# RENOVATION STYLE

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# 1890s

"The living room and dining room were one amoebalike space," architect Fred Wilson says. "We added the fireplace to get some organization and make the function of each room clear."

## open to **change**

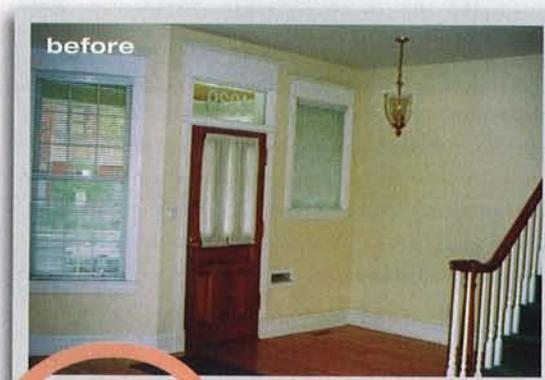
Spaces that are clearly defined but not closed off are the hallmark of this Chicago home renovated to suit a young family.

*by* Mara Boo  
*photography by* Jon Jensen  
*produced by* Hillary Rose





ABOVE LEFT: The powder room is an amalgam of Victorian style and contemporary fixtures. Wilson applauds homeowner Kate Fujishima's tile selection for the walls. "Colored tile like this typically offers a more contemporary look," he says. ABOVE RIGHT: Wilson redesigned and stained the newel to match the style of the house, replacing the inexpensive and out-of-place post installed during a previous renovation.



Call it a case of "twin-decision." Soon after their daughters were born, Kate and Burt Fujishima realized the house they'd purchased just the year before wasn't exactly their dream come true. "What initially drew us to this house was its extra-large lot," Kate says. "I was excited to garden, and we both thought it would be great for kids to play in. But once we had the girls, we began to realize the house itself wasn't very family-friendly. It became even less functional as the kids grew."

The couple's chief complaint was a kitchen too small to accommodate a dining table, offering only a tiny counter for meals. Further, it was isolated from the adjoining family room.

The Fujishimas weighed their options. A modest addition to enlarge the kitchen was one. Moving was another. To Burt, a real estate broker, the choice was clear. He knew duplicating their home's ideal location and its

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: Architect Fred Wilson clad the formal, symmetrical exterior in cedar and rebuilt and embellished the front porch. A new arched window allows natural light to stream into Kate's art studio space. OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: Fraternal twins Lauren and Brooke, 8, stand in the front entry. "The challenge was that there really is no true foyer, and we didn't want to put up a wall to create one and lose living space," Wilson says. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: Kate's determination to maintain the connection between the living room and dining room inspired the see-through fireplace. The simple lines of the limestone surround announce the home's more contemporary aspects. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The intimate dining room can seat eight people. "Before the renovation, it was difficult to figure out how to place furniture," Wilson says.



**ABOVE LEFT:** The kitchen sink only appears to be anchored by charming, tiny drawers. In fact, most are false fronts. A tilt-out drawer beneath the sink secrets away sponges and scouring pads. A pull-out garbage can hides to the left, and cookie sheets are stored to the right. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Though the windows flanking the oven face south, they're a mere 4 feet from the building next door. To coax light into the room from elsewhere in the house, Wilson specified transom windows above the refrigerator and sink. **OPPOSITE:** The kitchen's calm, dove-gray palette was inspired by a magazine photo Kate clipped and kept for years. "I spend a lot of time cooking in the kitchen, and I wanted it to be peaceful," she says. The teak-topped island conceals a pull-out stand for small appliances.

spacious yard—a rarity in the heart of Chicago—was unlikely. But Kate wasn't certain, so with Burt's encouragement, she explored homes for sale. "Burt was convinced we wouldn't find another house we liked as much as the one we already had," she says. "It turned out he was right."

The couple hired architect Fred Wilson to alter their awkward kitchen, never imagining at the outset how far their renovation would go. After all, a developer had already remodeled and modernized the hundred-year-old house in the 1980s, adding a family room.

"But it wasn't done to the best of industry standards," Wilson says. "There were structural issues to deal with. We had to rebuild the foundation to address water seepage. And the space was poorly organized, which made daily

living more difficult than it needed to be."

When he mentioned that eliminating the family room fireplace would create space for a mudroom, Kate was incredulous—and thrilled. "Pretty soon it became a discussion about what else we could do that easily, not just about a new kitchen," she says.

As the project blossomed, Wilson proposed a phased plan to address immediate concerns, such as the kitchen, and to save wish-list items, such as a finished attic and basement, for later. Ultimately, the couple elected to implement the plan all at once.

"They really wanted to open things up," Wilson says. "Our fundamental goals for the house became an easy flow and a consistent, unified look from room to room."





**TOP:** The 15 “drawers” in the peninsula dividing the breakfast room from the family room are an illusion; six are drawers and the rest are cabinet doors, offering a wide—and clever—range of storage options. The family room side is stained walnut to match furnishings. **LEFT:** Natural light drenches the family room, lending a sunroom atmosphere unusual in an urban setting. Kate’s childhood piano nestles in an alcove. **OPPOSITE:** Clearly visible from the family room, the mudroom comprises distinct zones, each with its own purpose. Cubbies provide concealed storage for hats and gloves, while the girls’ toys and games are stashed behind closed doors below. The herringbone-pattern limestone floor hides all evidence of backyard-loving children and Chicago’s famously soggy weather.

## STORAGE

Architect Fred Wilson filled this house with clever storage so the family can tuck clutter away. Here's how he did it:

### Preserve the view.

Because Kate and Burt Fujishima's mudroom is easily visible from their kitchen and family room, organization is imperative. Cubbies with doors conceal clutter and guarantee the space is company-ready.

### Think double duty.

The peninsula between the breakfast area and the family room houses kitchenwares on one side and electronics on the other. Although it appears to contain multiple drawers on the kitchen side, some are false-front panels that accommodate bulky items, such as the television, on the opposite side.

### Climb the walls.

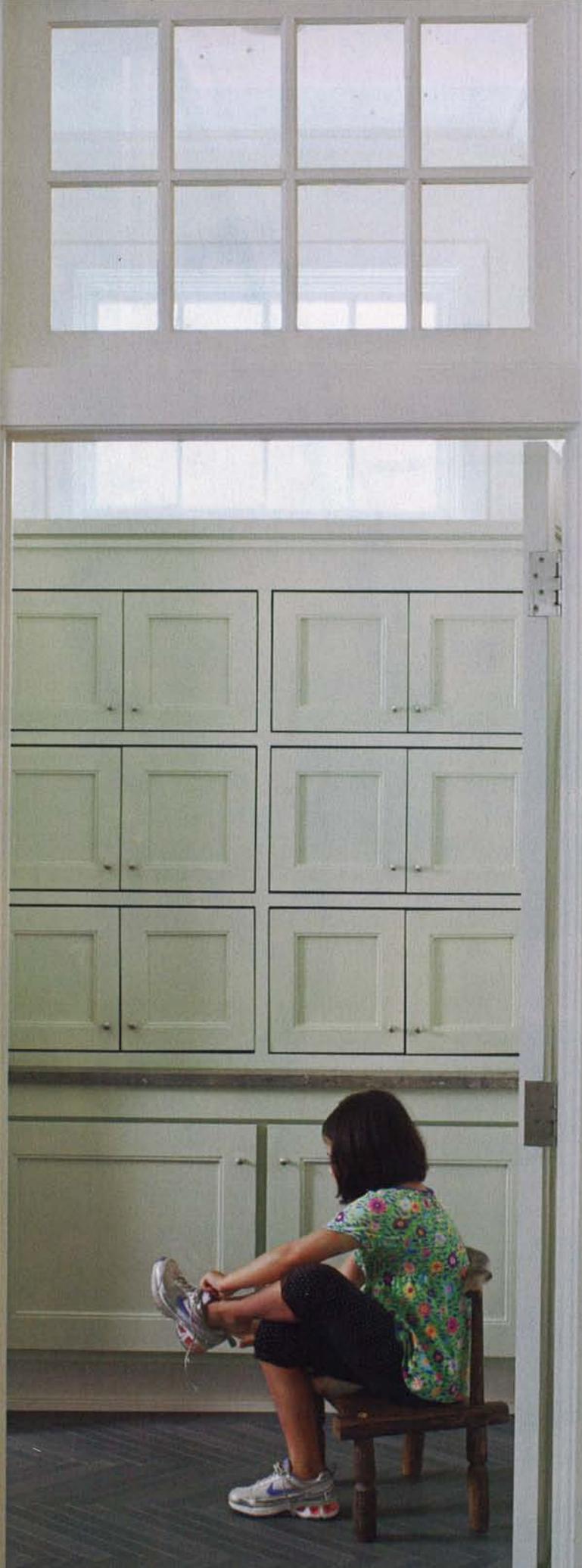
By thinking vertically, with built-in shelves above the piano, Kate and Burt gained open storage in their family room. Wilson sketched variations of the arrangement on the drywall until Kate was satisfied the dimensions were just right.

### Look out below.

Why use a bed just for sleeping? Drawers beneath Lauren's and Brooke's beds free floor space for tea parties and boost the flexibility of the room.

### Clear the decks.

Countertop cubbies corral toiletries in the twins' bathroom and keep the sink area tidy. Wilson used drawers rather than medicine cabinets because they're easier for kids to reach.







OPPOSITE: Wilson redesigned and rebuilt the entire staircase stretching from the basement to the top floor. "We did it more as an opening all the way up to give a sense of all four floors," he says. "Our intent was to create a dynamic vertical piece." ABOVE: The fireplace is the master bedroom's most prominent feature. Notable for its lack of ornamentation, the fireplace exemplifies the simplicity of this soothing space. "Kate was all about making sure every inch of this house was either storage or shelves, but here she let that go, which was a good choice," Wilson says.

Rooms throughout the main level flow easily, yet they maintain clear boundaries. "It was important to use visual cues that give you definition but not barriers," Wilson says. A see-through fireplace, for example, separates the intimate living and dining rooms without closing them off. Likewise, a wall between the kitchen and family room was abolished. In its place, Wilson conceived a 12-foot-long storage-packed peninsula to delineate the spaces while enabling views, conversation, and light to pass between them.

Light is critical to the success of the renovation, thanks to the new bay window in an 80-square-foot bump-out in

the family room. "That bay is really the only addition to the whole house, but it's key," Wilson says. "It completely changes the functionality of the family room, and it brings in a tremendous amount of light."

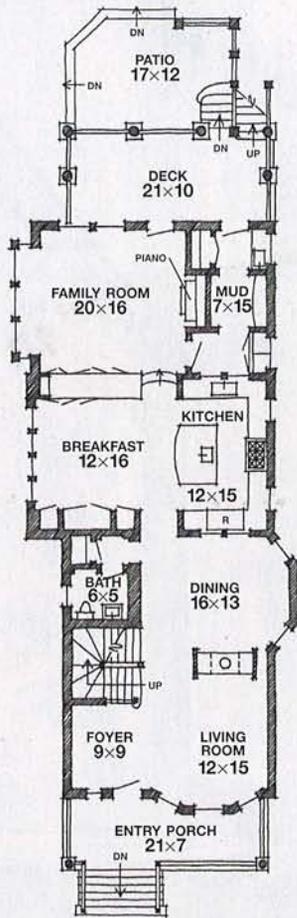
Because city homes tend to be dark, "we put transom windows all the way through the interior," he says. "They pick up the light from the family room as they progress through the house, making every room brighter."

Meanwhile, the kitchen was enlarged not by an addition, as Kate and Burt originally contemplated, but by eliminating a pantry and relocating a powder room. That freed

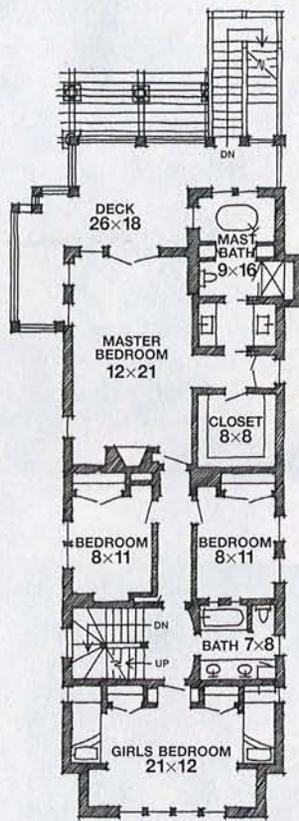
The twins share a bedroom at the front of the house. "It gets all the afternoon sun," their mother says. "It's bright and cheery, and it's just perfect for them." Along with a dreamy captain's bed, each girl also has a bookcase and storage cabinet.







main level



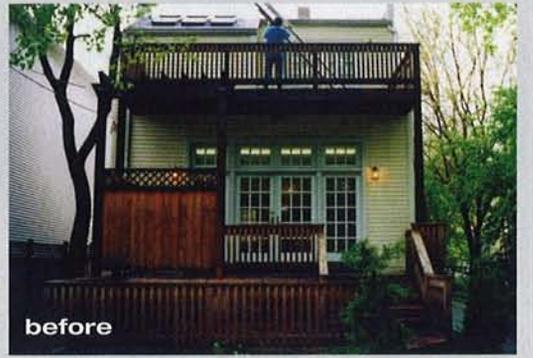
upper level

## voice of experience

### Outdoor Living Space

Consider traffic and planned usage for outdoor living spaces in the same way you would for your interior spaces. Improve flow by eliminating barriers and connecting usable areas. Here, the addition of stairs to connect what were two small, isolated outdoor rooms assures that each will be more readily enjoyed.

➔ Find more outdoor living ideas at [RemodelingCenter.com/remstyle](http://RemodelingCenter.com/remstyle)



before

enough space to create a breakfast room. It also provided the opportunity to establish a clearly modern feel for the house without sacrificing its character.

"The wood cabinets are contemporary but not cold, and the whole thing has an earthy feel that's still somewhat traditional," Kate says. Materials help accomplish that mood. "You can use vintage profiles but get a cleaner look by using limestone and stainless steel," Wilson says. "Everything in the mix plays off each other. That's what makes it fresh."

Equally fresh is Kate and Burt's approach to their daughters' bedroom. "My friends ask me all the time why the

girls share a bedroom when we have four in the house, but it never dawned on me to split them up. They're very close," Kate says. "Sometimes they even sleep in the same bed."

Most nights, though, Brooke and Lauren nod off in their own built-in bunks, cleverly designed with storage drawers below. The cozy berths eliminate the need for extraneous furnishings.

"Our house is practical," Kate says. "And it's a happy place, because it's so easy to live here." ■

For more information, see Resources on page 116.

OPPOSITE: While it was important to maintain a formal front facade "to be a good neighbor," Wilson says, the rear elevation offered an opportunity to create an asymmetrical experience. "We broke it down into more of a garden expression," he says, "with the trellis and the different decks." The upper-level deck is accessed via French doors from the master bedroom; the deck underneath is reached through the mudroom.

