

Style by design

Raising the roof on a

by Homefronts News
Service

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With the exurbs growing and traffic worsening, location is still the key to value in residential real estate. Got an older home with some backyard privacy and a tolerable commute? Top-to-bottom renovation is the Washington-area's frequent solution.

But what if the path to modernization is barred by structural constraints? Suppose your rooms are dark and cramped because the offending interior walls are actually holding up the roof? Or what if the problem to creating that dramatic cathedral ceiling is that the roof is pointing in the wrong direction from the pitch you want?

These were among the issues Bethesda residents Bob and Elizabeth Margolis confronted recently with the help of Steve Kirstein, a design/build consultant with nationally recognized BOWA Builders, Inc.

As the Margolis' soon learned, when the first order of business is relocating something structural, design must follow function. Yet there's something aesthetically pleasing about an interior that shows you where its beams are.

From the outset, the potentials for this 7,000-square-foot 1950s rambler were plain. Situated on lushly wooded acreage that backs up to the Congressional Country Club, the home had location to spare. An easy commute kept urban centers at hand. Yet walk out a door to the lower-level deck and one is surrounded by nature's leafy bounty. Exit the living room to the rear and a spacious Florida room provides a sweeping view of rolling greens.

Still, after occupying for less than a year, it was also clear the formal and rather boxy floor plan wasn't adapted especially well to the needs of a modern family.

"For one thing, the living room was dark . . . and felt very con-

finied," Bob recalls. "The sunroom on the back, while apparently original, had the effect of reducing the flow of natural light into the interior."

Though the ceilings in the sunporch and living room were the standard 8 feet, the restricted indoor/outdoor visual continuum left the impression that the interior was short on headroom. Horizontally pinched sight lines, in turn, drew unwanted attention to a plethora of anachronistic appointments ranging from the shag rugs and acoustical tile ceiling supports to circa-1970s metal hand rails.

"Much of the house looked very dated," Bob noted, "But it all seemed to hinge on the rear wall to the living room which didn't allow enough light yet couldn't be moved or changed since it was holding up the roof. This became the immovable object situated between me and my redecorating plans, and we weren't sure what to do."

Not that the living room was the only anachronism.

The kitchen and adjacent office (where Elizabeth had hoped to divide her day between watchful parenting and time on a home computer) quickly became a kind of gauntlet comprised of smallish rooms partitioned by a second structural wall. In need of a top-to-bottom makeover, the kitchen lacked comfortable dining spaces, a bit of head room and larger sources of natural light.

Raising the roof

The first step: completely removing the roof in the central part of the house. Where the pitch of the original roofline ran from one side of the house to the other, the new roof would span the sunroom and living room from front to back along a central ridge beam 16 feet off the floor. This physical and visual link defines the new sunporch and living room as adjoined spaces which direct the eye

mid-century rambler



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Columns dividing the living room and front foyer were extended and wrapped in wood. The old metal hand rail, refurbished and modified to match the new post design, now gives the room a stylish touch of "art deco."

both out and up.

Perfectly aligned sets of arched radius glass windows in both the sunroom and living room add to a dramatic upgrade in the visual linkage to the outdoors while substantially increasing natural light inflows.

To preserve the simple, unobstructed lines of the ceiling vault, BOWA avoided using traditional interior collar ties, fabricating an unseen steel boot to tie ridge and rafters together.

Old-fashioned Jalousie windows in the sunroom were replaced with insulated low-e glass. Bolstered by electric baseboard heat, the former seasonal room is now appreciably mainstreamed.

The re-designed space is also strikingly architectonic.

A study in symmetry, the re-worked interior is comprised of

glass and solid panels framed by gracefully curving soffits balanced on either side of a hearth designed to stress vertical accents.

Columns dividing the living room and front foyer were extended and wrapped in wood. The old metal hand rail, refurbished and modified to match the new post design, now gives the room a stylish touch of "art deco." Likewise, the original terrazzo stone flooring of the foyer - repolished and buffed to stunning effect - contributes to an elegant ambiance.

Relocating a washer and dryer to the bedroom wing enabled designers to carve out space for a dry bar convenient to the dining room, living room and kitchen.

Likewise, converting the guest room bath to a powder room accessible from the hall quickly proved a popular step-saving

move with family and guests.

Kitchen and office

Not to be lulled by illusions of simple solutions, though, uniting the kitchen and office into a functional whole presented a new set of structural challenges.

The plan at first seemed simple enough. Raise the ceiling about 6 inches, carve out a breakfast area and create a kitchen-to-office linkage that would allow Elizabeth to attend to business while keeping an eye on the two young children.

The obvious course was to remove the rear kitchen bearing wall by shifting roof weights to a steel beam that would span the opening and hold the roof up. But when the search for ways to redistribute load-bearing weights got under way, Kirstein discovered the existing roof structure was below standard building code

and, in fact, woefully unable to support added stresses.

His approach — multiple side-to-side microlam beams — provided the requisite supports, enabling the design team to both remove the wall and slightly elevate the interior ceiling, as well as to add two large skylights. The move also creates added inches for a back-of-the-kitchen radius overhang counter with stools which functions as both a snack bar and room divider.

Though the plan adds only a few square feet, a bay on the front elevation provides the extension needed for a cozy breakfast niche.

The added space also accommodates a food preparation island, a second dishwasher, and a substantial increase in cabinetry. Soffits and moldings are employed to define separate working spaces throughout the area.

Set off by random width white maple wood flooring, granite surfaces and backsplash, stained cabinets and indirect lighting, the whole combines high function and warmth.

For information: call 301/657-3947.