

When this 1920s Dutch Colonial needed some major updates, traditional detailing decided homeowners Joe and Jill Presta on improving instead of moving.



the well-crafted nest

A couple forgoes a complete rebuild to save the Arts and Crafts charm that drew them to their Northern Virginia home years before.

BY SCOTT SOWERS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB NAROD



Significant interior and exterior renovations included the signature "Eagles Nest" octagonal tower accessible from the master suite.

SIXTEEN YEARS AGO Joe and Jill Presta were living in a condo in Falls Church, Virginia and working their way through an extensive house hunt. "We probably looked at 20 properties that were totally not us," says Jill, "but the charming details and the stonework on the house in Clarendon sold us." The home that set the hook is a Dutch Colonial style, solidly built in the 1920s and added onto a few years before the Prestas took possession.

The new homeowners lived in the house for several years without making any adjustments, until plumbing issues forced them into a tough decision. "It got to the point where only one of the three bathrooms in the house was working, the other two were leaking," says Jill. The couple's first thought was to slap a patch on the pipes and move. "We decided to look around and see what was out there but the new construction homes were out [because] there was no fine detailing. And most of the older homes were smaller than ours."

The Prestas decided to try a different tack and hired an architect to re-imagine the house with a bigger kitchen, more storage, a master suite, a garage for Joe's vintage Corvette, and all new plumbing. The design process bounced back and forth for two



Two strips of triptych windows bring natural light into the family room and keep the space in the correct historical context. Over-stuffed furniture provides a comfortable room for relaxation.



A stone fireplace warms the master bedroom, and a ship's ladder leads from the sleeping area to the "eagle's nest."

years as Jill carried her design inspiration to the meetings. "I have a book called 'Bungalow Style' and the joke was that it was my bible," she recalls.

Jill's jump-off point was the Arts and Crafts movement, a revolt against the machine age that brought décor, design and furnishings back to a time where everything was made by human hands. The detailed woodwork and natural materials of the era lent themselves to flourishes the house already possessed. After meeting with three builders to decide who would execute the hard-won final design, the job fell to John Murray, VP of Production for **BOWA**, based in McLean, Virginia.

The first order of business was tearing off the ill-conceived addition to the back of the house. "We were happy they didn't do a good job of putting on the addition," says Murray, "it made it easy for us to take it off." Removing the addition proved a relatively simple part of the job as the plans called for joining a second gambrel roof segment onto the existing house. The foundation had to be extended, but the tight confines of the property blocked using heavy machinery.

"The lot isn't very big and we had to do a lot of hand-digging," says Murray. The grind of excavating with shovels and buckets was compounded by the mental challenge of safely removing two load-bearing walls. "We had to build a post and beam system to hold the house up so we could remove and then put in the new walls."

The complex engineering required to extend the house raises the question of just tearing down the old structure and starting

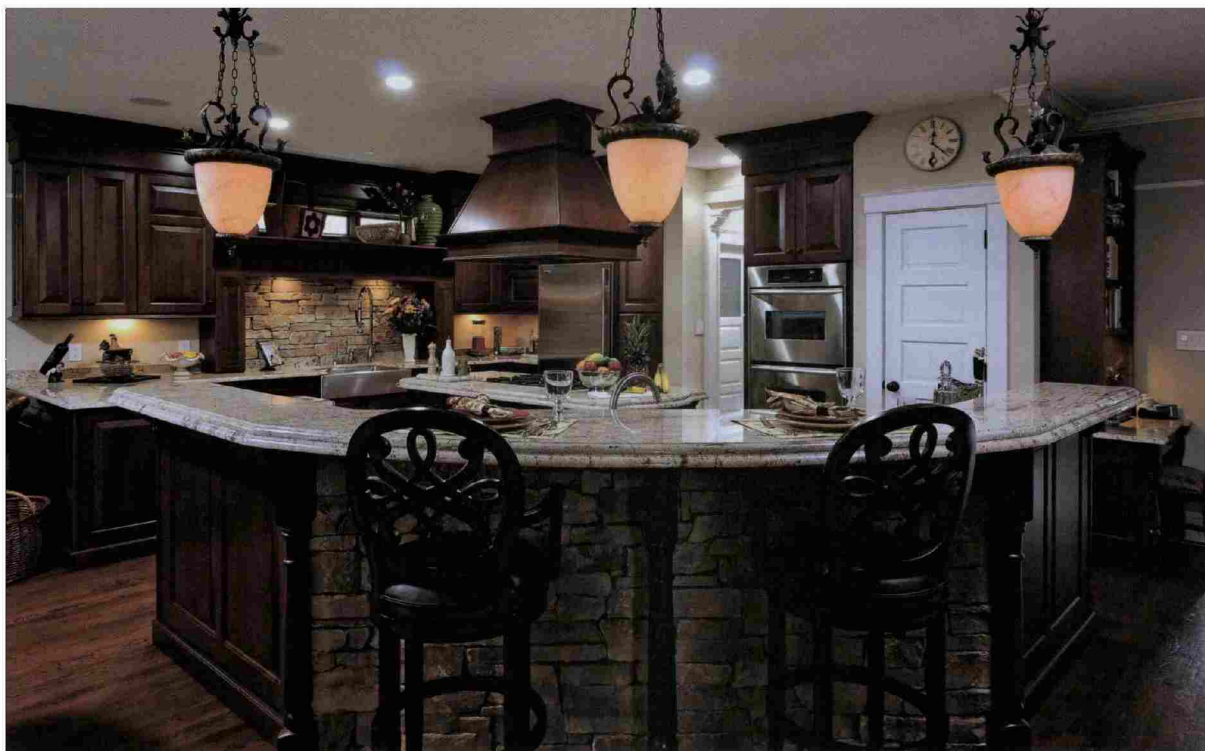
from scratch. "I don't think that was ever considered," says Murray, "there was just too much character in the house in terms of things like the original plaster work, windows, and moldings."

For a while, the Prestas lived among the demolition and construction. Dust and debris were kept at bay by sealing off the openings to the work zone, but eventually there was no safe haven and the couple fled to an apartment two blocks away. The renovation was completed in a swift nine months.

The results reveal the effects of Jill's diligent research of the Arts and Crafts movement. Wood trim bares the intricate details of times gone by. One of the home's original windows was re-used and re-positioned into the foot of the staircase and period-friendly five-panel doors provide room transitions. The downstairs powder room is defined by a vessel sink and a vanity fashioned from an antique reproduction.

Hardwood floors lead guests into a kitchen infused with Old World charm as the Prestas borrowed some ideas from their Italian heritage to frame the space. Dry-stacked stone accents the bar and backsplash. The functional configuration of the island was a must-have on Jill's list. "The concept for the kitchen really started with having the cooktop in the island," she says, "that way I can cook and still talk to guests." The range hood and cabinets are cherry and the countertops are a mottled, neutral shade of granite.

Just off the kitchen lies the new family room. The stone used in the kitchen makes another appearance to tie the spaces together. Two strips of triptych windows bring natural light into the room



ABOVE: Infused with Old World charm, the kitchen borrows some ideas from homeowners' Italian heritage. Dry-stacked stone accents the bar and backsplash. **BELOW:** The formal dining room offers a more traditional space and pops into focus with a judicious use of red furnishings and accessories.

and keep the space in the correct historical context. Over-stuffed furniture provides a comfortable room for relaxation.

The formal dining room offers a more traditional space and pops into focus with a judicious use of red furnishings and accessories—a throwback to the home's original look. "It really started with the red area rugs that I always had in the house," says Jill,



"the chairs and the wall colors play off the floor coverings."

Upstairs, the house soars as a stone fireplace warms the master bedroom. A ship's ladder leads from the sleeping area to the "eagle's nest," an octagonal map room the couple uses to plot out cruising journeys that will be enjoyed on their soon-delivered boat. The Washington Monument can be seen from the nest, a room where the beadboard walls and intricately cut ceiling jibe nicely with the nautical theme.

Another special touch to the master suite is found in the spa area, which contains a five-person hot tub and wet bar. Exhaust fans vent away condensation and marine grade coverings used on the ceiling keep things ship-shape. The master bath features twin vanities with a travertine top, a soaking tub, steam shower, separate water closet, and two generous closets.

Going from top to bottom without sparing attention to detail, the plans for the basement specified a wine room with stone-finished walls, tile floors, and mahogany bottle storage. A fitness room and the requested garage complete the home's lower levels.

The finished home provides much joy to the Prestas but also to the crew leader who made it all happen. "This project is my all-time favorite," says Murray. "The most exciting part for me was taking the elements of Joe and Jill and putting them into the space." Jill's favorite element is the eagle's nest. "When you're up there, you don't feel like you're here in the city," she says "I just love the feeling of openness." ♦

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