

Home Spotlight: www.heraldtimesonline.com

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For thirty years we've been doing things to this house," Ed said ruefully.

He and his wife Claire have completed four major remodels on their charming limestone cottage. Built in 1940 near campus, with maple floors and arched doorway openings, this small house has never stopped growing.

"The house started out with two bedrooms downstairs," explained Claire. "Then a previous owner finished the attic and put in two more bedrooms and a full bath."

In 1964 a modernist rear addition was built containing a great room with exposed ceiling beams, dark wood paneling and a glass wall facing the yard. Above it was a spacious master bedroom. Two different remodeling projects have focused on this addition.

"I don't hate modern architecture, but it didn't go with the rest of the house," Claire observed. "The only support for the whole western wall was a 4 x 4 post. During the blizzard of 1978, snow built up on the flat roof of the addition and by 1992 the post had rotted to the point that you could see daylight around the frames of the sliding glass doors. The frames of the doors were heavy aluminum and they were helping to hold up the whole wall."

What began as a \$500 repair evolved into a legendary remodel that became the subject of an architecture MA thesis because of the problems involved. The entire wall was rebuilt with new patio doors, new windows and beefed-up support.

Some years later it was time for more work on the addition. The modernist stairs were blocks of wood that were cantilevered out from the wall, open all the way up. The supports were starting to go and there were ominous creakings whenever someone used the stairs.

Mark Longacre of Longacre Construction, Ed and Claire's longtime contractor, partially enclosed the staircase, installing a banister and spindles that would have looked right at home in 1940. The dark paneling in the great room was removed and the trim was painted white. The room now harmonizes much better with the architecture of the rest of the home.

The side door to the house, Ed laughed, "looked like the door to a barn." So, the solid door was replaced with one that had glass, with flanking side lights, while the old cedar shake surround became ceramic tile framed with custom-carved limestone that matches the house's older style. "It made all the difference in the world to this room," Claire said. "Now it receives morning light."

The dining room overlooks the great room, which was constructed on a slightly lower level than the rest of the house. A raised dais at the end of the great room provides a transitional area to the dining room. Previous owners occasionally used the dais as a stage; Claire employs it as a buffet when entertaining.

The cramped galley kitchen needed a separate remodel.

"The kitchen was tiny, about eight feet wide," Claire said. "I thought about it for two years before doing anything because it was so awful and so inconvenient. If someone was working at the stove, another person couldn't open the refrigerator, which was directly opposite the stove."

The kitchen ran along the rear wall of the house, with a tiny breakfast nook next to it. The 1964 addition covered half that back wall. After careful thought, the remainder of the exterior wall was bumped out five feet. This extended the nook and also converted the kitchen to an "L" shape large enough to provide workspaces for four people. An upstairs bedroom also gained more space with a dormer addition.

"Mark Longacre did the work, and Clarity Design replicated the mid-century birch cabinets with a cherry finish," Claire noted. "Birch has a depth to it that's very nice."

The new cabinets have pull-out shelves inside them, so the homeowners have no difficulty reaching items stored deep under the counter. An "appliance garage" contains the mixer and other small electric devices, stored neatly out of sight. A pantry was added by nudging the kitchen wall two feet toward the enlarged dining area.

The colors of the rugs in the great room and dining room were carefully selected by Claire; their designs represent variations on the tree-of-life pattern. They were hand-woven in Nepal and Afghanistan. Claire has published two books on Africa and is keenly interested in the ethnography of that continent. African carvings, including masks, headrests, a decorative cane and statuettes, are arranged around richly painted walls.

"My dissertation was partly about the history of Ghanaian traders," observed Claire. "A lot of them were cloth or bead traders, so that's how I got interested in African fabrics."

The home is filled with brightly patterned textiles she has brought back from Africa; some are used most effectively as upholstery on custom-designed sofas.

"I used to buy scraps of fabric from seamstresses in Ghana in the 1970s," she explained; "they thought I was completely out of my mind for wanting it. But a lot of the pieces I picked up are vintage, from the 1950s or earlier. Putting them together is so much fun! I make patchwork tablecloths and African-style jewelry that I sell for two women's groups in Kenya that foster development. I also bring back a lot of jewelry from Kenya. The jewelry makers in Kenya are driving the fashions here right now for big, chunky jewelry!"

The house is no longer "a shack stuck onto the back of a cottage," as the homeowners described it. It is filled with beautiful, well-built living spaces.

"Computer software and houses are similar," observed Ed; "the first time you modify them it's simple, but by the fifth time you modify them, it's deep trouble."

Any advice for other homeowners facing similar scale of renovations?

"Tear it down and start over!" advised Claire, laughing. "But the challenge has been fun in some ways and the results are rewarding."

Ed and Claire's 1940 home shows no sign from the street of the extensive addition in back. Photo by Carrol Krause



The formerly modernist great room has been given a makeover so it blends better with the 1940 date of the original cottage. Photo by Carrol Krause



African textiles and carvings decorate the great room. Photo by Carrol Krause



Two steps lead up from the great room to the dining room, creating a dais at the end of the room. Photo by Carrol Krause

