



..... **A MEASURE**
OF CALM

QUIETING THE EXTERIOR of the house involved replacing an ornate mansard-style door hood with a sleeker version and changing the palette from beige to a brown with green undertones. The color allows the building to visually recede into the landscape. A new triangular skylight and a wall of windows flood the foyer (FACING PAGE) with light. The new glass balustrade reveals a visitor's destination — the public spaces upstairs.



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A 1990s style statement, reconsidered, is remade into a soothing millennial retreat





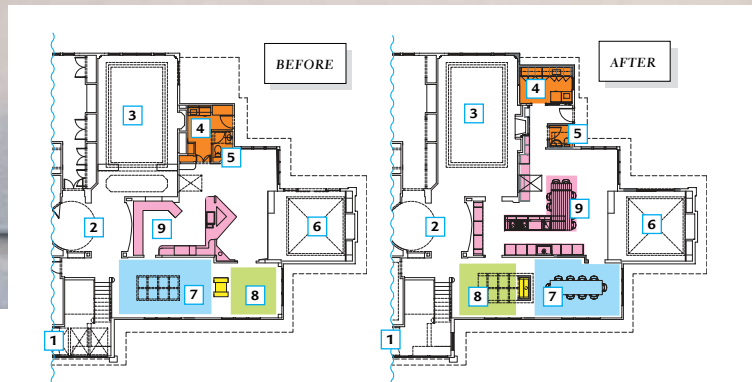
ARCHITECTURE IS NO STRANGER TO FASHION.

Georgian, Greek Revival, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival ... every style has

been just that, a statement of its time, not unlike a high-finned Cadillac or a Nehru jacket. But unlike those more perishable products, a house is something we're rather loath to discard. That's not necessarily a bad thing — many of us feel fortunate to call the fashions of the past our homes.

That doesn't mean, however, that a once-fashionable house can't change with the times. The modest 1959 ranch that lies buried somewhere in this home in Boston's western suburbs lives on only in photographs, as the owners, a married couple with three grown children, have been expanding and improving it in successive waves since they bought it in the late 1980s. First, they added a foyer, then a large rear addition, then a family room and enlarged bedroom, and finally an entire third floor to give their children (and themselves) more privacy. The husband, whose father was a builder and developer, once thought of pursuing architecture professionally. He chose a different path, but, as he says, his co-workers know from experience that "if I'm not working on a project in the office, then I'm working on my home."

The last round of renovations had left the house's interior with a strong visual stamp that clearly said "1990s": pickled white oak floors, stark white walls with black accents, a sleek gray



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|---------------|---------------|--|
| 1 ENTRY | 6 FAMILY ROOM | ■ DINING ROOM relocated to a more private and intimate space |
| 2 FOYER | 7 DINING ROOM | ■ LOUNGE moved to create a transitional space linking public to private areas |
| 3 LIVING ROOM | 8 LOUNGE | ■ KITCHEN enlarged the space and improved layout to better relate to the rest of the house |
| 4 LAUNDRY | 9 KITCHEN | ■ FIREPLACE moved and redesigned to accommodate the new configuration and style |
| 5 POWDER ROOM | | ■ POWDER ROOM + LAUNDRY shifted to a small addition with access to the back yard |

WITH ITS CONTEMPORARY furnishings and glowing tray ceiling, the living room now feels poised and calm. Dark woodwork around the fireplace is matched by a new floor. Above the foyer, the rotunda (FACING PAGE) doubles as a gathering spot and sculpture gallery. The floor inlay is a cherished art piece the owners made sure survived the renovation.

laminated kitchen, and an anodized-aluminum stair railing in the foyer that did double duty as an arresting piece of sculpture. Combined with his and his wife's considerable art collection, the house was "screaming 'wild!'" says the husband. They loved it, but by the time the 2000s rolled around, it was time for a change — toward calm.

Which is perhaps why they found themselves at a designer's reception at Montage one evening in late 2004. At this contemporary furniture store founded in Boston 50 years ago, the common thread tying most of the

retailer's offerings together is a quiet, understated elegance. Also in attendance was architect Bradford C. Walker, whose Boston firm Ruhl Walker Architects is known for its clean, almost minimalist design, with an emphasis on honest materials and precise geometry. After introductions, Walker was invited out to the house for a look.

"We agreed that the house needed a kind of hierarchy," says Walker. "The architecture was competing with the artwork — it was a boisterous place that the owner wanted to simmer down." Thus began a collaborative



Italian cabinetry and stainless steel. With an induction cooktop, multiple wall ovens, a wine cooler, and banks of wall storage, its main event is a dramatic L-shaped island that is a combination of steel work area and planked wood table. “If I’m going to go through all of this,” the husband remembers thinking, “I want to walk into a new space, not just a room with new cabinets.”

To expand the kitchen, posts (remnants of the original house’s exterior wall) were removed from the middle of the room. New structural beams were installed and 18 inches of extra height was gained from the attic. Walker moved a half-bath and laundry room into an adjacent addition. The resulting space is high, wide, and magnetic, its sheer scale providing visual impact.

Uniting all the rooms is subtle, soothing color, the work of interior designer Patrick Planeta of Planeta Basque Boston, who collaborated with Walker and the homeowners to “tone it all down.” The wife was particularly tired of living with cold white walls, so Planeta used faint notes of red in the different shades of white he employed. The living room, for example, has baseboards in one tone, walls in another, and three others on each successive ceiling soffit.

The final touch: changing all the pickled white flooring to a deep coconut brown. “It makes each room seem bigger,” says Planeta, while firmly grounding the rugs and furniture, much of which came from Montage.

True to his enthusiastic and engaged style, the homeowner acted as his own general contractor. The work took a bit more than a year and involved dozens of tradespeople to harmonize style and structure. Yet as complex as the renovation was, the result is a symphony of calm. ■

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design exercise, with Walker sketching something and the husband, who brings the eye of a seasoned “serial renovator,” able to grasp the design concepts quickly and respond.

Perhaps the most challenging space was the one that gives visitors their first impression: the foyer. To subdue it and marry it better with the rest of the house, Walker closed the open stair risers and replaced the busy railing with one made of clear glass. He also added windows to the front wall, resulting in a light-filled cube with a clear, solid connection to the public sections of the house.

At the top of the new foyer is the rotunda, where a disk of colorful inlaid wood in the floor (a boisterous detail from the 1990s renovation) is lit from above by a circle of windows. The room acts as a crossing point between public and private spaces and as a sculpture gallery, the art beautifully displayed against neutral walls. Adjacent is an inviting lounge, a cozy grouping of round ottoman and chairs in front of a gas fireplace set in a column that separates it from the dining room beyond. It is a natural progression of public environment giving way to private setting, but it didn’t exist prior to Walker’s renovation. The architect switched the original dining and sitting rooms, a change that required moving the column several feet.

Behind the dining room door is the kitchen, a tour de force of gray-stained oak

A SLEEK ASSEMBLAGE of stainless steel, built-in appliances, and oak veneer cabinetry (ABOVE) marks the Italian-made kitchen by Arclinea. The attached table (RIGHT) is built from oak planks to match the cabinets. Reversing the lounge (FACING PAGE, TOP) with the dining room creates a logical progression from public to private space. In the family room (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM), the once-white cabinetry is stained to match the dark floor.

