



Inspired by History

The old and the new come together in this Alamo Heights craftsman

BY CHRIS WARREN

When lawyers debate the U.S. Constitution, arguments often revolve around the concept of original intent—basically, what the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote the document in the 1700s. Craig McMahon is an architect, not a lawyer, but the idea of divining original intent was very much on his mind when he began work last year on a redesign of a 1930s craftsman-style home in Alamo Heights.

McMahon's clients, an expectant family, bought the house on Argyle Avenue with the intention of changing it. "Over the last 50 years, the house had been what I call re-muddled," says McMahon. "The original floor plan and character had been lost and the rooms were compartmentalized and dark." McMahon's task was to simultaneously return it to its original design intent while modernizing it to meet the needs of 21st century living.

To help inspire McMahon's work, the homeowners found an original Sears, Roebuck and Co. design similar to the Argyle Avenue home. One of McMahon's top priorities was to open the interior of the house up to natural light so it didn't feel so claustrophobic, even though it had 9-foot ceilings. To do that, McMahon made the home more interconnected by opening walls that originally kept spaces compartmentalized.

At the same time, the home's kitchen had to be expanded and modernized in order to make it both more functional and an appealing gathering space. Though the interior of the kitchen is brand new, it retains much of its original cabinetry. Similarly, the hardwood floors and checkered tile in the living and dining areas were saved and refinished.

McMahon was also intent on restoring and improving upon the original home's connection to the outdoors. In the front of the house, that meant rebuilding and adding a roof to the porch—a choice that both dramatically changed the curb appearance of the house and also provided a connection to the neighborhood. "The original craftsman design had a front porch to allow people to enjoy the street," he says. "Now you can sit outside and wave to the neighbors and be protected from the rain."

A connection to the outside was also important in the back of the home, where a new master bedroom and bath were added. A once-covered backyard porch is now connected to the bedroom and a living area. "It expands the livability of the house and creates a place to entertain," he says.

Throughout the house, addition by subtraction was possible by removing elements that had been added through the years to expose original detailing. "This really helped bring back the home into its original unique craftsman character," says McMahon. No Supreme Court ruling is needed to see that. ★

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