The rear, three-story addition includes a new breakfast room, kitchen, family room, porch, bedroom and an expanded lower level.

before & after

CHEVY CHASE VICTORIAN

OLD HOUSE NEW TRICKS

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THE DOMINANT ARCHITECTURAL MOVEMENT of the day, at least in the Mid-Atlantic region, seems to borrow heavily from classical and traditional styles. Of course there is a smattering of unique contemporary designs being produced, and architects are constantly pushing the envelope with new concepts. Still, many custom home clients are looking for "old-world" charm. Yet they don't want to give up on modern conveniences. So architects, custom homebuilders, and interior designers alike are updating the traditional designs to accommodate larger more functional rooms, smart house wiring, flat screen televisions, and state-of-the-art, gourmet kitchens.

So what if you want all of the above and more, but you don't plan on building a new house? And what then, if you plan to grab your share of "old-world" charm by living in an actual old-world home, but you still need the architecture to work for a vital, growing, modern family? Well, you assemble a team of top house and garden professionals to help. Which is exactly what the owners of this historic Victorian farmhouse did shortly after purchasing the home in Somerset, a small historic enclave of Chevy Chase, Maryland. Because the house needed plenty of architectural revising before it would function for a family of five, Greg Wiedemann and Megan Mitchell of Wiedemann Architects were consulted to help plan the renovation. Rounding out the team were the homeowners' interior designer Pamela Gaylin Ryder, their landscape designer Mary Tweedy, and custom homebuilder Peterson & Collins.

Somerset, a historic suburb of Washington, DC, offered everything the new owners wanted—the charm of an older home and plenty of space for their family. Many of the neighboring homes were built in the late 1800s, and the property itself was large and deep with lots of room for kids to play. Because of the home's age and historic location, any new renovations needed to conform to the Historic Preservation Ordinance and the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation. This posed a challenge for

The original stairs in the foyer help maintain the home's old-world charm.

the homeowners and professionals, demanding thoughtful design and creative solutions.

Originally built in the 1890s, the Victorian farmhouse had it's share of embellishments, but the details were simple, not the ornate gingerbread often associated with the style. The owners in the 1970s did some considerable remodeling, installing a set of stairs from the foyer to the basement, adding a living room and two porches off the back, and moving the front door. The new front entry of the house provided access to two sets of stairs—the original historic flight to the second floor and the added stair, situated directly in front of the main entry.

According to architect Greg Wiedemann, "Most of our work consisted of reconsidering the work done in the 1970s, restoring the original rooms from the 1890s, and designing an addition in character with the historic home." While success in this endeavor may have been realized by the professionals involved, it most certainly was guided by homeowners. As builder Ted Peterson puts it, "Successful projects like this start with owners who are committed to the project, who play a key role in the day-to-day decision making, and who take the lead in guiding a project."

Under this guidance, primary goals for the project were established. First the renovation needed to focus on the needs of the family while still respecting history. The 1970s addition would need to be reworked, and the house ultimately would need to be conducive to entertaining.

According to Megan Mitchell, project architect, "The clients' initial desire was a house that is open and airy; so the rooms needed to be reorganized—but they also needed private areas, to read in, for example. By adding new doorways throughout we helped achieve an openness while still respecting the character of the original floor plan."

Wiedemann adds, "We wanted to create a cohesive whole—a series of rooms that connect with the feel of an 19th century farmhouse and the needs of a 21st century family." It was also important to bring "a more substantial character to the house, a less abrupt transition from old to new." Traditional scale, proportion, and sequence were needed to make the new and old relate.

The basic project consisted of re-envisioning the existing architecture and supplementing the home with new living space. The two additions off the back were removed and replaced with a three-story addition that included a new kitchen, breakfast room, family room, and rear porch on the first floor, a new bedroom on the second, and an expanded lower level. Nearly 2,000 overall square feet were added and yet the net increase in the footprint was only 500 square feet, maintaining as much of the back yard as possible. Additionally, says Mitchell, "We needed to make areas for children to play." The lower level playroom, for example, spills out to the backyard, and special details and work or play spaces throughout the home were designed specifically with the three children in mind.

To achieve the new space in accordance with the homeowners' goals and to make the structure sturdy for another 100 years or longer, "nearly the entire house needed to be gutted," says builder Ted Peterson. "The biggest challenge was that the existing structure was in such bad shape that it needed to be totally resupported and reconstructed. We had to beef up or replace the joists and double up the rafters, replace the roof ridge, and do so in a way that it still acted as a membrane."

According to Wiedemann and Mitchell's plan, "All of the interior finishes were reconstructed, with the exception of the remaining historical rooms—the parlor and the stair hall—and the original stairs to the second floor were restored." What was the kitchen is now a formal dining room, and added space on the first floor became the new kitchen, breakfast room, family room, and porch. "The two less compatible 1970s additions were removed from the rear of the house and restructured in a new addition reflecting the gable and character of the original front porch. By removing and relocating the set of stairs providing basement access, we were able to open the foyer and create a 'view through the house' from front to back."

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When it comes to houses, it has become a cliché to say, "They don't build them like they used to." Fortunately, with builders like Peterson & Collins, this cliché is being turned on its ear. Working closely as a team, Wiedemann Architects and Peterson & Collins worked to achieve the client's goals not only for the structure but also for its details, providing the highest quality custom cabinetry, millwork, and finishes to match and complement those original to the Victorian farmhouse.

And in terms of construction, Peterson & Collins combines old-world fortitude with new-world technology. According to Peterson, "We bring an overlay of practical appreciation to a project, and we build with an eye for longevity and maintenance issues. We consider how the elements will affect the house, and, without deviating from the architecture, we make sure that areas of the roofline, for example, toward which water will gravitate are constructed to hold up over time."

Nor was the importance of subtle details lost on Peterson & Collins, who did all of the cabinetry as well as interior and exterior millwork including moldings, brackets, doors, and shutters. According to Wiedemann, "Peterson & Collins was well-suited to the project and the level of detail we were after. Because they have an in-house millwork shop, we were able to work back and forth with them to develop the various architectural details."

Fortunately for the architect and builder, developing custom details was aided by informa-

White cabinetry and countertops are balanced by warm walls, adding to the understated vernacular of the Victorian farmhouse.

The original parlor was converted into a multi-functional space that incorporates a sitting room and a home office with built-in desk.

BEFORE

tion from some remaining original details throughout the home. The front room, for example, was defined by the original architecture "This helped us to make decisions about how to treat the new spaces," says Peterson.

Mitchell agrees, "We had enough information from what was left in the front rooms to make decisions for new areas." Often, the original molding was used to pattern the new—new knives were cut-to-match for use in the millwork shop. Still, on occasion, new spaces required new details. The niche in the gallery, for example, needed moldings unlike those found elsewhere in the home. For spaces such as this, the architects looked to complement the style of the original, adding embellishments typical of the Victorian era.

Along with new considerations for the architecture and interior design, most of the landscape needed to be re-envisioned as well. When Mary Tweedy first assessed the project, the existing landscape was overgrown, particularly in the front, with a plant palette she best described as "eclectic."

After consulting with her clients, Tweedy established that the landscaping should suit the farmhouse style. The homeowners desired an "old-fashioned garden," and yet it was important the landscape exhibit all-season interest with blooms throughout the spring, summer, and fall, and berries, foliage, and texture for the winter. To achieve a flowering season that stretches from March to October, Tweedy incorporated a bevy of perennials and shrubs including many different varieties of hydrangea as well as wisteria, cherry, clematis, hollies, and fifty different "old-fashioned" perennials such as peonies, iris, and phlox.

In addition to these aesthetic goals, the rear yard needed to be significantly redesigned to solve drainage issues as well as accommodate both the new architecture and a growing family. Since they were moving from a home with a small yard, the homeowners wanted to capitalize on the extra space and

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provide ample room for kids to be kids. To accommodate these requests and realities, the poorly-drained sloping lawn was dug out and leveled, and a retaining wall was installed creating distinct spaces within the yard—plenty of room for the kids to play, a gazebo, a secluded hammock nook, and extensive perennial gardens.

Since the house is over 100 years old and the homeowners wanted the home to look "established" despite the new construction, Tweedy worked to achieve "instant gratification" in the landscape. Foundations were covered, drainage issues were addressed, mature plant material was installed, and walkways, paving, and stone walls were constructed to complement the architecture and create a sense of flow from the house and through the landscape. To further the established look, azaleas and crape myrtles were lifted and relocated from the existing landscape. In addition, a cherished Japanese maple "memorial tree" planted in memory of a loved one was transplanted from the old yard, adding history and sentiment to the landscape.

All along, as the architect, builder, and landscape designer were at work, interior designer Pamela Gaylin Ryder was busy making sure that the décor would complement and reflect every other facet of the project. According to Mitchell, "Pam's effort was parallel to and in sequence with ours. We had some dialogue about what would be appropriate for the house and then throughout the completion of the project, Pam worked with the homeowners to select carpeting, window treatments, and furnishings."

ABOVE: The new family room opens to a second-level porch overlooking the garden.

BEFORE

LEFT: The garden provided inspiration for the redesigned living room.

ABOVE: The new dining room space is reconfigured from what was the original kitchen.

"This was my second time working with this client," says Ryder. "I had known my clients for a long time, they were ready to make decisions, looking for an understated, unpretentious, kid-friendly décor. They wanted places to read and relax; [they wanted] comfortable chairs."

While Ryder had an ongoing relationship with the client, the renovation really helped spark them to do more with the interior all at once. Based on the homeowners' taste and the architecture, the style of the interior design developed a strong French country influence. According to Ryder, her client, "really appreciated French fabrics and garden feel. They like pattern and color and wanted the fabrics to be vibrant…The details, scale, and millwork, make the house. My job was to help carry out a cottage-like feel, to relate the décor to the garden and history."

To begin Ryder took cues from the homeowners' existing furnishings, art, and accessories. "They have a very nice art collection and other pieces," says Ryder, "so with this project it was more a matter of rethinking the current living spaces and adding to the new ones."

Wiedemann and Mitchell had converted the original parlor into a multi-functional space that incorporates a sitting room and a home office with a built-in desk. Accordingly, Ryder notes, "The hot pink study with original fireplace will be a well used room." It is an important space where the homeowners work, entertain, and relax.

The garden, which had become a focal point for the exterior, also provided inspiration for the living room, which was added in the 1970s. And since fabrics were very important to the clients, much thought went into the selections for upholstery and window treatments. The room was also very long, so when the architects added a second entry, the space could effectively be divided in two. Ryder took advantage and developed two distinct areas: a focal point in front of the fireplace and a reading space adjacent to the foyer.

Also adjacent to the foyer, the new dining room leads through a butler's pantry to the kitchen addition. According to Ryder, the kitchen in the homeowners' previous home was very similar and they liked it." White cabinetry and countertops are punctuated by warm walls and splashes of color. The breakfast nook offers a view of landscape framed by scalloped window treatments reminiscent of a French cottage. "Everything was designed to blend," says Ryder. And blend it does, seamlessly from one room to the next, from old architecture to new, and into the yard, where the view offers something of interest throughout the year.

This easy transition didn't come easy, yet the process was gratifying for all involved. Wiedemann, Mitchell, Tweedy, Ryder, and Peterson all agree that the project was not only successful but also enjoyable for all parties. Each individual worked to bring the project into a harmonious whole. When asked to comment on the final outcome, Wiedemann offers, "My most vivid memory of the project was the close collaboration among members of the team. With this project I feel that we've developed relationships that will continue well into the future." According to Peterson, this harmony was orchestrated by the enthusiasm and dedication of the homeowners. "We all enjoyed the project because it was obvious that the homeowners were excited—it was clear that they really appreciated the work we were doing."

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