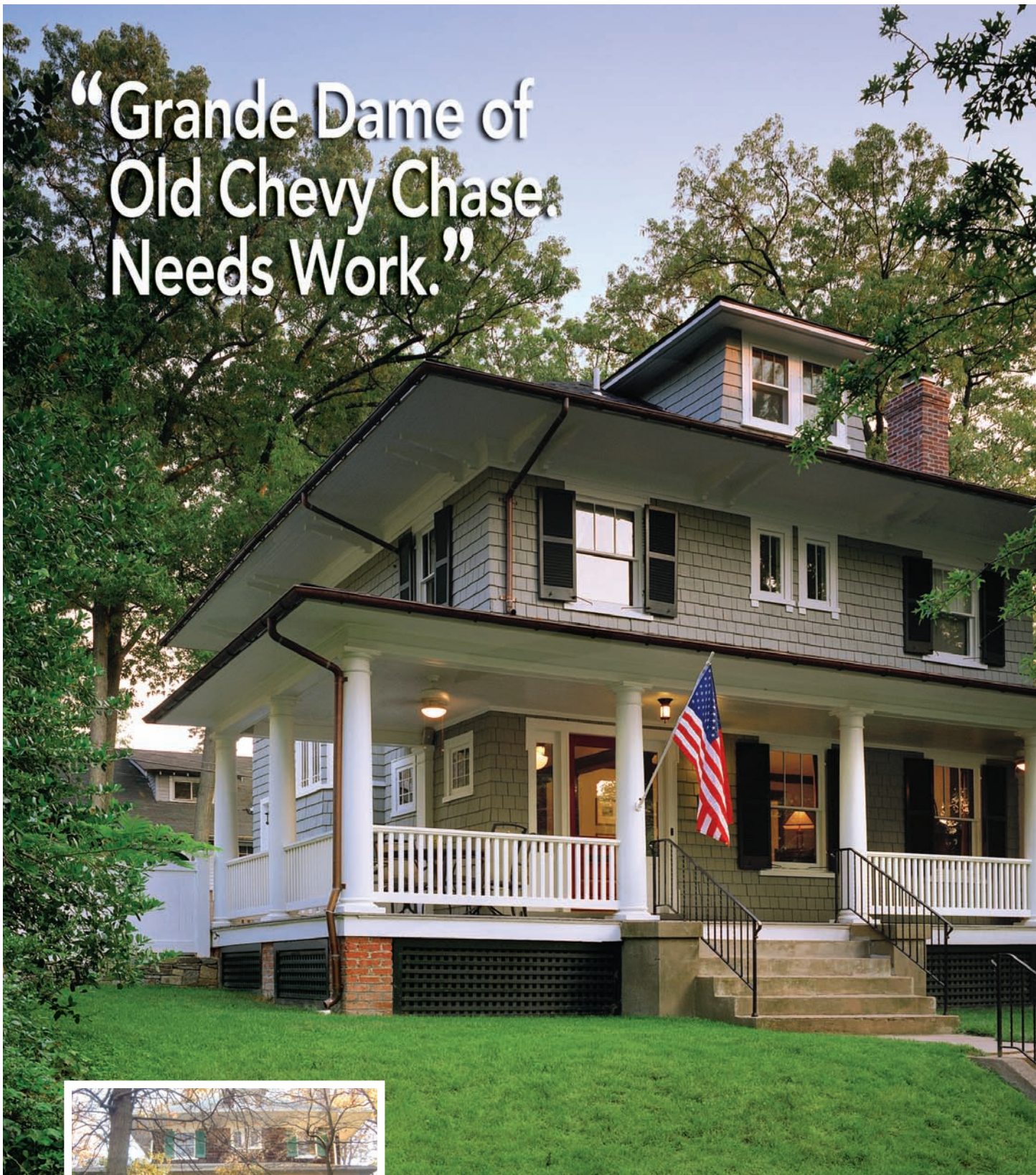


“Grande Dame of  
Old Chevy Chase.  
Needs Work.”



*Restoring an original Chevy Chase foursquare*



**A** FEW YEARS AGO, TOBY MILLMAN AND HIS fiancée Jessica were sitting in a traffic jam waiting for a presidential motorcade to pass by in Rock Creek Park. It was the morning after her bachelorette party. The wedding was soon. To kill some time, Jessica pulled out the classifieds and started looking at real estate ads.

“Grande Dame of old Chevy Chase,” said the ad. “Needs work.” On a whim, Jessica called the agent then and there. The agent couldn’t show the home right away, but the Millmans went to take a look anyway. The foursquare home sat up on a small hill overlooking Huntington Street in D.C.

“We drove around the house about 50 times, getting more and more excited,” notes Toby. “It’s only when we got inside that reality hit.”

The owner had been born in the house in the early 1900s. His parents had owned it since it was built at the turn of the century. When the Millmans first saw it, the house was untouched by renovations—and looked, well, needy. The floors were sagging. All the plaster was failing and, in many walls, the wallpaper was holding the plaster together. The house was overrun by decades of dirt and debris. A crawl space and dirt floor comprised the basement. Every canceled check the owner ever wrote and every magazine and Pepco bill he ever received were piled to the ceiling in some places. “You couldn’t even see some of the walls,” laments Toby.

### **Knowledge Can Be Dangerous**

“Between us, we knew what we were getting into,” explains Jessica Millman. “We have just enough architectural knowledge to be dangerous.”

Toby Millman is Vice President of Project Development at Abdo Development and one of the visionaries behind the real estate company’s restoration of several distressed properties in the District of Columbia. Jessica is an urban planner with the Coalition for Smarter Growth. Both know what can be done with historic structures.

BY JIM MAHAFFIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANICE HOACHLANDER

The Millman’s foursquare home restoration on Huntington Street in Chevy Chase Heights was recently awarded an Award of Merit in Historic Resources from the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.



Jessica Millman's home office is in what used to be the unfinished attic—taking full advantage of the eave spaces under the roof. Carpenters built in the desk and shelves and dormer bench that overlooks Huntington Street. A trundle bed built into the cabinetry converts the office into a spare guest room.

From the beginning, the Millmans wanted to restore the home, not create something new. They needed a team that saw the home's promise as they did. Enter Greg Wiedemann, AIA, of Wiedemann Architects, LLC.

Wiedemann was experienced with this type of house—his portfolio included a small renovation on the house next door as well as other foursquare renovations. Just as important, he grew up in the area. "I went to nursery school in a wonderful shingle-style house on Grafton, and then onto Wilson High School," says Wiedemann. "I know the neighborhood well, and it's really rare to find a house of that vintage that hasn't been touched by a contractor today." The Millmans recognized Wiedemann's deeper appreciation for their project and asked him to take on the restoration. Wiedemann brought in McNamara

Brothers General Contracting of Silver Spring, a local builder that works on historic homes, including the one next door.

### **Adding Two Levels**

"It was a tragedy to see it at first," notes Wiedemann. "But the good news was that the house had never been renovated or added onto."

Though the house sits on a fairly wide lot for Chevy Chase Heights, there really wasn't a lot of space to extend the footprint. "We had to expand within the house," Wiedemann explains. Because the basement space was unused and the large attic had been used solely for storage, the first thing was to excavate the lower level and finish the attic. "Now there were four levels instead of just two," Wiedemann says.

Architect Greg Wiedemann says, “The original foyer was not up to the standard of classic foursquares. With custom millwork and detailing, we brought greater detail that’s more characteristic of this period of architecture.” This included cubbies for storage, a wood bench, and window and banister moldings.

### “Needs Work”—No Kidding

There were major structural problems. “We had to go all the way back to the primary structure,” Wiedemann states. The original joists were timbers that were saw-cut the old-fashioned way, when a two-by-four really was two by four inches. The contractors “sistered” quite a few of the sagging joists and beams, bolting new timbers to the old to reinforce the structure. The plumbing and wiring was in bad condition and was completely replaced.

The windows were in decent shape, although all of them had to be restored. They are framed today by the same beautiful oak millwork that’s used throughout the house. The Millmans found all the original screens for the windows, as well. After they were thoroughly cleaned, Toby said he was startled to find “Woodward & Lothrop” stamped in the metal of the brass lift handles. “Woodies” was an iconic department store chain that was founded in the late 1800s and headquartered in Washington, D.C.

### Inspiration Came from Everywhere

When you’re restoring a home, you get inspired by the very elements you’re working with, believes Wiedemann.

In the Millmans’ house was a beautiful bay window on the staircase landing. “It delivers views not just of the outside but along the lines of the house, as well,” Wiedemann notes, adding, “The exposed

The large dining room bay is original, but the Millmans added wood detailing to it to enhance the natural warmth of the room. They found the Arts and Crafts-style chandelier in an antique store in New Market, Maryland. The French doors were added; they lead to a small terrace on the east side of the house.



## The All-American Foursquare

The next time you walk through an older neighborhood, see how many foursquare homes you find. There are thousands of them, in Chevy Chase, Kensington, Palisades, Northwest D.C.—and across the country.

Easy and quick to build and particularly suited to fit smaller city lots, the foursquare is an American classic. The simple design typically has a foyer, living room, dining room and kitchen on one floor, and four bedrooms upstairs.

Attics and basements were afterthoughts—not ordinarily used for living spaces. A big front porch was standard. The style was very popular from about 1890 to the 1930s, said Evelyn Gerson, Archive Director of the Chevy Chase Historical Society. “It’s a Prairie-style home but it’s very boxy,” said Gerson. The humble home design was a post-Victorian style, yet the “Prairie Box” has a pedigree that comes from architecture pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Four even sides meant that building processes, such as sawing and fitting, could be done in bunches, increasing workmen’s efficiency. Entire foursquare houses were packed in numbered pieces by Sears, Roebuck, & Co. and other catalog home companies and shipped to home sites. Chevy Chase was created as a “streetcar suburb,” and foursquares are often found where rail cars could deliver the houses in pieces.

Foursquares were working-class homes, with none of the expensive decorations common in Victorian homes. Yet there were usually little touches that added interest, said Gerson. Dining rooms often featured a bay window to break up the straight lines of the house. Gerson’s own foursquare home has Italianate corbels on its box-shaped bay window, plus Tuscan-style columns. Outside, foursquares have different siding materials. Inside are built-ins, such as china cabinets or shelving, plus pocket doors and stained or leaded glass windows. Wood molding and mantels tend to be finely crafted and staircases have beautifully turned spindles, columns, and banisters.



stairs were an important characteristic that we wanted to preserve.” It was the same with the large oak bay window in the dining room. The architect added wood paneling and moldings to enhance the windows and the warmth of the room.

Jessica’s favorite room, the breakfast addition, was clearly influenced by the house’s front porch, with its hip roof, columnar corner moldings, and windows. The four-square’s Arts and Crafts or Prairie architecture pedigree

opened up all kinds of possibilities for fixtures, décor, and detailing.

In any design project, it’s imperative to take care with the size of spaces and how they relate to each other. Wiedemann states, “We worked with the Millmans to discover the essence of the house. Although we moved some walls, we respected the bones of the house and how the porch, roof, dormers, windows, and doors all relate to each other. You never want jarring contrasts or elements that clash. What we want to achieve when we’re finished with a project is a sense that the house was always that way.”

### Maximizing Other Space

When the home was built, kitchens and baths were utilitarian. They didn’t make design statements, and although what came from kitchens might be deeply appreciated, their size and beauty were never a source of pride for a homeowner.

Times change, of course. The challenge for the Millmans was to reclaim space for a nice new kitchen and master bath without taking away from the concept of restoring the original home. The new kitchen is in the same quadrant as the original foursquare design, notes Wiedemann. But his design gained space by using the old pantry and reconfiguring the basement stairs, which had constricted the original kitchen. The new basement stairs even incorporate a downstairs powder room.

In the back upstairs corner of the original home was a sleeping porch. Before the advent of air conditioning, families often created sleeping areas on outdoor porches, where there was at least a chance of catching a breeze

or enjoying cooler temperatures on hot summer nights. Wiedemann designed the existing sleeping porch into a new master bath with a claw-foot tub and separate shower. Pocket doors save even more space in tight areas.

### A True Centerpiece in the Family Room

The family room is not large, but the “wow” factor is extraordinary.

The fireplace was pretty basic when the Millmans and Wiedemann first saw it, but they both saw its potential. Flanked by large, double-hung windows, Toby and Jessica selected the distinctive tile from Motawi Tile Works in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Karim and Nawal Motawi are siblings who got their start selling tile off a table at the Ann Arbor Farmers' Market. Today, they have a large studio and showroom and sell their Arts and Crafts-influenced tiles across the country. The Millmans liked the stem and flower motif, and it fit within the Arts and Crafts style they were drawn to for their home.

The idea for the wood firebox surround came from *Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinguished Apartment Houses*, a coffee table book by James M.M. Goode, James Stafford Phillips, and James F. Tetro. In it, Toby found a photo of a mantel from the Avondale apartment building on P Street in Washington, D.C.

The building was from roughly the same era as his new home, so he sketched a version of the woodwork and gave it to Greg Wiedemann. Masters Woodshop of Hagerstown, Maryland made it real, in beautiful stained oak with a satin matte finish to match the woodwork in the rest of the house.

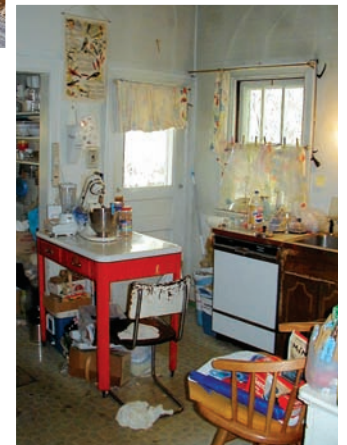
The artwork over the fireplace is an original window from the front door of a Toledo, Ohio apartment building from the early 1900s. When the building was torn down, the window was salvaged. Jessica found it on eBay, and it showed up on a truck a month after she bought it online.

### Restoration Results

"A foursquare has the height and openness of a Victorian, along with the warmth and humility of a bungalow," says Jessica. "We wanted ours to be beautiful but livable, too."



Flanked by large, double-hung windows, the original fireplace had great potential. The Millmans chose distinctive tile with a stem and flower motif to set within the wood firebox surround that Masters Woodshop of Hagerstown, Maryland crafted in a beautiful stained oak to match the woodwork in the rest of the house.



Above: The kitchen was designed by architect Greg Wiedemann and kitchen designer Glenda Powers with Bethesda Design Group. The cabinetry and millwork came from Rutt HandCrafted Cabinetry of New Holland, Pennsylvania. The countertops are honed granite. Storage cabinets were designed around the high ceilings and throughout the large center island to maximize space.



Left: Jessica Millman's favorite part of the house is the small bump-out off the kitchen. "The light in there is spectacular from the banks of windows we put in." The room overlooks the back and side yards. The extra space was taken from a small porch and is the only part of the home that extends beyond the original footprint. The Millmans wanted to see the backyard from the kitchen, so they added windows in the kitchen and breakfast room that overlook the back and sides of the house.

## Resources

- **Gregory Wiedemann, AIA, Wiedemann Architects, LLC:** 301-652-4022, 5272 River Road, Kenwood Building, Suite 610, Bethesda, Maryland, [wiedemannarchitects.com](http://wiedemannarchitects.com)
- **McNamara Brothers General Contracting:** 301-589-3767, 625 Sligo Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland
- **The Brass Knob Architectural Antiques, Inc.:** 202-332-3370, 2311 18th Street NW, Washington, D.C., [thebrassknob.com](http://thebrassknob.com)
- **Back Doors Warehouse, Inc.:** 202-265-0587, 57 N Street NW, Washington, D.C., [thebrassknob.com](http://thebrassknob.com)
- **Rejuvenation Lighting, Customer Service:** 888-401-1900, 2550 NW Nicolai Street, Portland, Oregon, [rejuvenation.com](http://rejuvenation.com)
- **Motawi Tileworks:** 734-213-0017, 170 Enterprise Drive, Ann Arbor, Michigan, [motawi.com](http://motawi.com)
- **Kitchen Designer—Glenda Powers, Bethesda Design Group, Inc.:** 301-229-6358, [bethesdadesigngroup.com](http://bethesdadesigngroup.com)
- **Masters Woodshop:** 301-797-1100, 743 Bowman Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, [themasterswoodshop.com](http://themasterswoodshop.com)
- **Rutt HandCrafted Cabinetry:** 717-351-1700, 215 Diller Avenue, New Holland, Pennsylvania, [ruttcabinetry.biz](http://ruttcabinetry.biz)
- **Landscape Architect—Lila Fendrick Landscape Architecture & Garden Design:** 301-907-7700, 6904 West Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland
- **Historic Chevy Chase D.C.:** 301-656-6141, Open Tuesdays 1-5, [historicchevychasedc.org](http://historicchevychasedc.org)
- **Chevy Chase Historical Society (Maryland):** 301-656-6141, Open Tuesdays 1-5, [chevychasehistory.org](http://chevychasehistory.org)



The master bath on the second floor is all new, reclaimed from the original sleeping porch at the back of the home. Toby Millman found the claw-foot tub at the Brass Knob in Adams Morgan. Custom windows were made to fit into the chamfered openings to preserve the feeling of the original sleeping porch.

Toby and Jessica planned for kids, and Jessica became pregnant with daughter Charlotte (now two years old) during the late stages of the restoration. The Millmans did not want a house with rooms that were off-limits to kids, and they love the result. Laughing, she says, “Charlotte’s favorite thing to do is to run through all the downstairs rooms in a big loop while pushing her stroller or dragging her dolly.”

“We were very particular about restoring the home. It helps so much to have a great architect and we truly loved our general contractor,” Jessica notes. “But you never know how painful it is to pick every faucet, and switchplate, and detail... Fortunately, we really agreed with each other on everything.”

“We love Prairie-style design,” says Toby. “We pushed Greg and our contractors on restoring it to perfection and showcasing it. We wanted something that could have been built like that from day one.” 🌹