

Treasures in the Attic



Creating a “suite retreat” in the second story

by Lucie B. Amundsen

After years of watching real estate prices go through the roof, more people are willing to raise theirs rather than seek out a bigger new home and a fresh mortgage. And these homeowners aren't just looking for an extra spot to hang their hat; they're creating spaces of true solace and retreat like this second-story master suite project in Minneapolis.

The homeowners, Jenneane Jansen and Kris Palmer, are busy professionals, with Kris's office located in their 1926 Tudor home. Nearly two years ago, they decided to convert their large first-floor bedroom into an expanded work space for Kris and turn the attic of their 1-1/2-story house into a spacious master bedroom escape.

Their fantasy was to transform their second story, with just over 500 sq. ft., into a master bedroom suite. The final plan, which cost nearly \$200,000 and took eight months to complete, included an inviting bedroom with a walk-in closet and a luxurious master bath—all done without disrupting the early-century charm of their historic home.

Max headroom

Before the remodeling, it was impossible to bring even ordinary-size furniture up the stairs because of the incredibly low slanted ceiling and the awkward 90-degree turn at the first-floor landing. “You had to literally duck and stoop down low to get up the stairs,” says Jansen. “My hubby jokes about whoever planned and built



Mini spa

This master bath, though small, packs spa-like qualities with its 6-ft. period tub and modern rain shower fixture. The reproduction tile matches the '20s flooring in the original downstairs bath. The wood trim was milled to the exact profile of the original woodwork in the house and stained to match perfectly.



Master bedroom hits new heights

The original ceiling was removed, adding light and drama and giving the master bedroom an elevated, loftlike feel. Triangular fir trusses reflect the era of the original construction. The reading and writing nooks are now inviting with high ceilings and pushed-back walls. Accent lighting highlights the exposed trusses and emphasizes the openness.

Remodel Right

remodel right



the old landing, saying that you should never drink and build.”

To address these problems, the team from Mike Otto Construction made the stairwell a straight shot, punching the stairway out through a room downstairs. They also altered the roof to create adequate headroom on the stair’s upper landing and in the master bedroom as well.

“We put a lot of effort into designing the roof alterations we needed without disturbing the stonework on the exterior of the house,” says Otto.

A challenge in any second-story conversion is avoiding that “cramped attic” feel. Rather than furring down the rafters an extra 6 in. to accommodate a thick blanket of fiberglass insulation, they used closed-cell urethane to attain a high insulation value in minimum thickness. This allowed them to use the existing rafters without losing ceiling height. “When you’re working on a room with slanted ceilings, even an inch or two can make a big difference in the visual comfort,” Otto says.

Max space and style

To get the most out of the limited space, architect Joseph Metzler’s design captured unused footage over the stairwell to cantilever “his” and “hers” bathroom sinks (top photo, p. 33). Another inactive zone, the area behind the existing knee wall of the hallway, was converted into a recessed house “library” with custom bookcases and cabinets. This addition lends warmth, as well as sensible storage, to what would otherwise be an unremarkable passageway to the bedroom.

“The builder was able to cleverly camouflage the cold air return vent within one of the shelves and hide the filter unit to the air conditioner in a cabinet,” says Jansen. “All in all, the bookcases provided many solutions.”

A particular design challenge came from the existing rooflines, which created quirky little nooks within the master bedroom. Squeezing even more lemonade from the lemons the project handed them, the designers and clients together decided to open these spaces up. By eliminating some of the roof cross-ties (p. 31) and dressing up others with decorative trim and accent lighting, the team transformed these corners into cozy read-

ing and writing nooks. “The warm wood ceilings and trusses bring the eye upward, and these areas have become inviting focal points instead of awkward eyesores,” Otto says.

Surprise, surprise!

Houses have stories to tell, and during a remodel, they’ll wail tales of woe. The demolition of a floor above the garage revealed 2x4 floor joists that were not only undersized, but also improperly fastened to the walls. “I always thought the floor had a spring to it. Now I understand how lucky we were not to have crashed down through it,” says Jansen. The floor had to be completely rebuilt, adding unexpected labor and expense.

Another headache came up when they were finishing the ceiling in the master bedroom. The hand-framed roof and knee walls were a mishmash of angles and pitches, lending credence to Kris’s “never drink and build” caution. The solution was to painstakingly level and “shim out” each rafter.

“There are a lot of coffee mug stains under the flooring representing hours of pondering while shimming and remeasuring and doing the dance of happy mediums until everything looked right,” says Otto.

Max comfort

Despite their love of historical details, Kris and Jenneane didn’t want to live with the discomforts of yore. The couple chose heating and cooling systems that eliminated radiators and floor vents, adding precious space to the floor plan.

They used a retrofit-friendly high-velocity air-conditioning system by Unico. “We liked the discreet little portholes used in this system to deliver the cold air. There is no big air-conditioning grille mounted on the inside of the wall to try to de-emphasize,” says Otto.

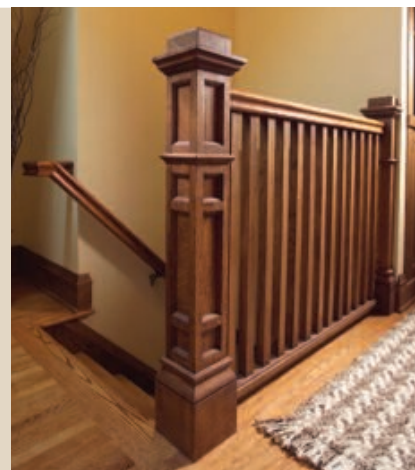
While the joists were exposed, Otto took the opportunity to install hydronic heating tubing to comfortably regulate the upstairs temperature with hot water. (For more information on heated floor systems, see “Toasty Toes,” p. 63.) Jansen enjoys the simple pleasure of a heated floor, saying, “It’s really nice underfoot when you get out of the shower.”



Vanity secrets
The opened bathroom vanity doors show the upper enclosure of the stairway. The sinks were built over it to save space.

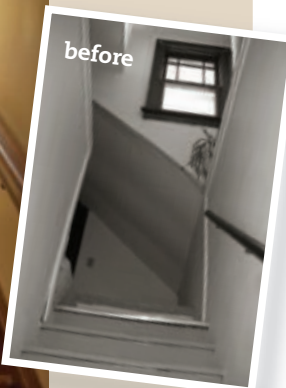
Design details

The architect provided authentic building details throughout the project. Here, the balusters were positioned close together, replicating building practices from the 1920s.



More headroom, please!

Before the renovation, one required the flexibility of an acrobat to ascend the stairwell and a ladder to access the window.



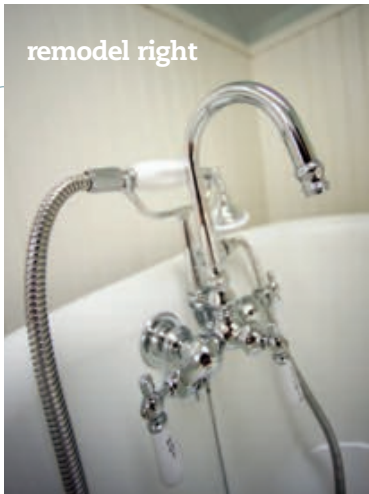
after



Book smarts

Replacing the knee wall with custom cabinets and bookshelves made the passage to the master bedroom both functional and beautiful.

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Old tub meets new faucet. The artful stand that cradles the shower wand showcases the graceful lines of this vintage-looking, but new, tub fixture.

Bridging 2006 with 1926

Protecting the home's 1920s aesthetics was paramount to the homeowners. The couple hit antiques-salvage shops and the Internet looking for authentic period fixtures. But where their hunt fell short, Kris and Jenneane again went to the Internet and found knobs, handles, lights and even replica windows from manufacturers specializing in fixture reproduction.

"We've been committed to retaining the style of our home. We found our authentic claw-foot tub on eBay and Kris drove all the way to Pennsylvania to get it," says Jansen. Finding a fixture to work in the antique, as well as getting the tub's plumbing to meet modern building codes, was a real head scratcher, but the couple agree it was well worth the hassle. "The tub may seem like a small detail, but it adds something really special to the entire project," Jansen says.



Historical windows on the world. Authentically reproduced windows make a huge visual impact on the reading nooks without the leaks and drafts of ages past.



Faucet fit for a flapper. The retro knobs and sink-stopper pull tie the '20s style into the contemporary vanity.



Old-style commode. The knob on top of the toilet tank is not just for show; it's the working flush handle.



Old and new knobs. Can you tell which of these pull handles are 80 years old and which are reproduced? The couple ordered reproductions through salvage stores and on the Internet. The new pull handles are the two on the far-right drawers.

Buyer's Guide

Faucet: Grohe 4-in. mini widespread faucet from the Seabury line. Product No. 20122. \$233. www.grohecatalog.com/product/20122

Windows: Kolbe and Kolbe French in-Swing casement reproduction window starting at \$1,000. www.kolbe-kolbe.com

Knobs: Hexagonal glass bridge pulls, 3-in. white, item No. 4152. \$8.75. www.rejuvenation.com

Toilet: Kohler Iron Works Tellieur elongated toilet K-3456. \$818. www.us.kohler.com

Tub fixture: Barclay leg tub faucet with hand shower. No. 4022 polished chrome. Starting at \$239. www.homeannex.com

Art Direction • BECKY PFLUGER
Photography • BILL ZUEHLKE

Plans illustration • JOHN HARTMAN

Contractor • MIKE OTTO CONSTRUCTION INC.

Architect • JOSEPH METZLER, SALA ARCHITECTS INC.

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