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Open House

BY DENISE GEE AND CHARLOTTE SAFAVI PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK JOHNSON

To make room for his growing family, George Myers expanded his 1890s home to more than three times its original size. Its new, less formal dining room makes accessing the front porch a breeze.



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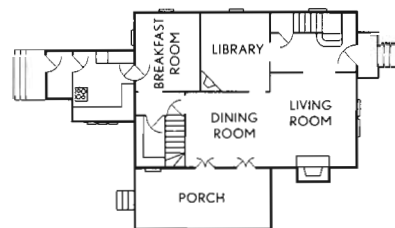
o eager was the Myers family to live on just the right street in just the right neighborhood

that it took one rental property and two home remodels to get it right. Bethesda, Maryland, architect George Myers and his wife, Janine, knew from visits to nearby Kensington that the community's large parklike home lots would be perfect for raising a family. "It's a real walkable place," George says of this suburb north of Washington, D.C. "You can spend the whole weekend here and never get in your car. A family can just walk for a loaf of bread or some scoops of ice cream. That's a rarity these days." But finding the right place to live in this modern-day Mayberry didn't prove to be easy.

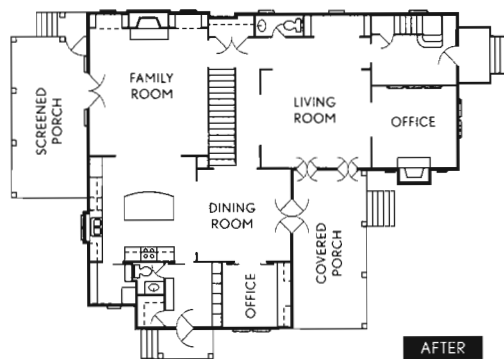


A new screened porch (*far left*) adjacent to the family room offers easy access to the backyard. The family, along with dog Teddy, often gather for food and games at the porch picnic table. The widened foyer (*left*) is the first clue that the Dutch-Colonial-style house (*above*) is much larger than its facade might indicate. Its shingles are unpainted to show off the beauty of cedar.





BEFORE



AFTER

George had just finished remodeling a Victorian farmhouse not far from his family's current home when he decided that the reconfigured house, which had taken up much of its lot, wasn't going to offer enough space for his children to play. "We began that renovation process when we had only one child," he explains. "Six years later we had three more. We had to do something. We needed room for them to run, both indoors and out."

The answer would be found in another house close by—a small Dutch Colonial that George had fancied early on. "It definitely had the land—26,000 square feet of it—and the bones to grow along with us. It truly was just the right place for us." But effectively transforming the three-bedroom, one-bath house from 1,500 square feet of living space into 5,000 involved many months of planning and work with the Kensington Historical Society. "They were concerned that tripling the size of the place would

The warm and comfortable family room sees a lot of activity, so materials are mostly dark and durable. "We didn't want any rooms that our kids couldn't go into," George says. On either side of the stone fireplace are built-in nooks filled with favorite books, games, and toys.

ILLUSTRATIONS: STEVEN STANKIEWICZ



Our house is designed so that it's OK to let the



kids run in circles. Nothing is a dead end.

GEORGE MYERS

overwhelm the original house," George recalls. "That led us to setting most of the new square footage back away from the street, so from the front it still looks like a cottage." He also carefully matched gables and columns. And in keeping with his neighborhood's other Victorian houses—built primarily as summer retreats by D.C. city dwellers—he added two new porches to further expand its living space and better connect the home to its environs.

Before its remodeling, the home's interior was "very choppy, with small rooms and lots of doors," George says. The reality of having four young children—now ages 4 to 12—dictates the



The kitchen is the hub of the house. A large island doubles as a family table where kids have breakfast before school and eat pancakes that George flips on Saturdays. "People are always amazed when they come in here," Janine says. "From the front it looks like our house hasn't changed much, but when they come into the kitchen they realize just how open our place really is." Light-color materials also add to the room's sense of openness.



abode's new open, kid-friendly layout. "George and I are not very formal," Janine says. "We like things to be casual and comfortable because of our active lives." Such thinking parlays into the design. In light of the home's history, "we used a lot of historic paint colors, but nothing too dramatic," Janine says. "With four kids running around, we wanted something soothing." Also calming is the design's use of natural light. "We made sure the sun came in every room," she says. "There are even transoms in the mudroom and pantry."

Transparency is the hallmark of the house. "I like to see across the house into multiple spaces, like from the front hallway to the back family room," George says. "It gives a visual clue to the home's mission of openness."

To host the hustle and bustle throughout the house, expanses flow together—on each level and between them. The first and second levels are connected by a new back staircase to allow easy access to the main living areas from the upstairs bedrooms. The back stairs descend into the center of the home, and halfway down the flight, a window overlooks the family room for yet another layer of openness. As the kids trickle down to the kitchen on weekend mornings, they peek through the opening to see who has beaten them to breakfast.

The children also gravitate to the back porch just off the kitchen and family room. "Since our kids are constantly in and out of the house, our porches make nice transition spaces for them," George says. "They're also relaxing places for all of us to simply sit and enjoy the sounds of the neighborhood."

Now that the dust has settled from all the moving and remodeling work, Janine teases George about keeping the home's future remodeling projects in check. "She says I have a building disorder," the architect says with a smile. "I can't help it—it's what I love to do." As he surveys all the open land around him, an idea sparks. "There are always outbuildings I can plan." 🏡

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Janine's office (top left) has a built-in desk along one wall, with computer terminals at each end for family use. Drawers hold the children's school files. "We put a lot of effort into designing this place how we really live," Janine says. In the mudroom (left), each one of the kids has a built-in locker to hang coats, store backpacks, and leave muddy shoes on the easy-to-clean slate floor.