



The original wood floors were removed, taken outside, cleaned up and reinstalled. The Messinas raised the roof for a more open feel.

photo by Chris Fritchie

This Old House

By Debbie Vallejo

THERE IS a certain charm to older homes, a nostalgia that cannot be replicated by anything other than time and sentiment. For some people, renovating old houses is merely a means to an end. The end result is what really matters; everything that comes before is just one big necessary headache.

For others the journey is just as breathtaking as the destination, the process of change just as important as what's created when the change is complete. Bob and Deb Messina found that they were members of this second group when they experienced first hand the satisfaction of breathing new life into an old home and creating something fabulous and unique out of a dying building.

Renovation is not for the faint of heart. It requires tenacity, creativity and no shortage of cash. There is always the inevitable twist that comes in every project, where nothing works exactly as planned and some major adjustments are needed requiring an additional truckload

of cash. The Messinas were aware of the potential pitfalls involved in renovating a home, but when they had the chance to purchase the small house next door to their landscaping business in downtown Frisco, they jumped at it.

The home, located at 7126 Elm Street, was built in 1923 complete with hardwood floors, a small front porch and a backyard with more square footage than the house itself. The Messinas purchased the home in 2005 when the owner of the property passed away. The combination of a desire to downsize mixed with the need to look out for their business interests made the offer of the little house too much to resist. The Messina family moved out of their home in Frisco's Starwood community and into the 1,000 square foot, two-bedroom home on Elm Street.

WHY RESTORE ANYTHING?

The goal of the renovation was to maintain the appearance of a house built in

the 1920s while providing the comforts a modern family enjoys. The plans for the house flowed together well for the couple; no fighting or arguing over what changes to make or where to spend their money. "It came natural to us, figuring out what we wanted," explained Mr. Messina. "We added convenience and features as we went along and as a result it all came out exactly how we pictured it."

Part of creating the look and feel of an older dwelling involves utilizing as much of the previous materials used to build the home as possible. The original house had wood paneled, eight-foot ceilings and each room was sectioned off from the other, causing the box-like feel often associated with homes built during that time. The Messinas created vaulted ceilings by taking out the original wood paneling and opening up the attic. The original wood panels were cleaned up and placed in the higher, vaulted space, along the interior roof line. A loft runs



down the center of the house and is accessible from the living rooms and both bedrooms. The unique placement of the loft gives the look of a large open area while maintaining the cozy feel of a smaller home. It also provides space for extra storage and a small guest bedroom.

The kitchen posed another challenge for the Messinas. Having lived in a home complete with every modern culinary convenience, they wanted nothing less in their house on Elm Street. It was quickly apparent that the original kitchen would have to be completely gutted and new space added to the back of the home. Bob extended the foundation, creating about an additional 800 square feet. The completed kitchen is more than 400 square feet and holds stainless steel Viking appliances with a commercial grade cooktop and custom made cabinetry. New wood floors complement the existing ones in the other

rooms and a skylight allows an amazing view of the Frisco water tower. In the evening the tower's exterior lights are lit and the resulting view from the kitchen skylight is literally picture perfect.

The bathrooms also earned a complete overhaul. The original bathtub was repaired, cleaned up and placed in the master bath. New ceramic tiles make up the floor and a completely tiled step-down shower provides modern comfort and convenience. The water faucets and fixtures throughout the house have an antique feel and were purchased with the understanding that details matter. "I put a lot of work and thought into everything a person will touch around the house," explains Mr. Messina. He saved money by purchasing quite a few items online, but that created some headaches along the way as well. "Anytime I ordered online I saved half the price, but there was usually something missing," he says. "I made lots of trips to Home Depot and Lowes."

In addition to the renovations inside the home, the Messinas made plenty of changes outside. Each bedroom has a small private porch that is accessible by a set of French doors. The original porch was expanded to wrap around the west side of the home where a stone pathway leads to the house next door where the Messina's landscaping business is located. The convenience has become an important part of their life because the business often requires Bob to stay late into the night working up bids or creating landscape designs.

The backyards of both homes blend together and allow the family to have plenty of room for different projects. They built a raised Victory garden out in the back yard and are also planning to make over the workshop that sits between the two houses.

BUILDING ENERGY EFFICIENCY
Creating energy efficiency in a dwell-

The kitchen is part of the 800-square-foot addition to the home (left); The original bathtub has a new lease on life

photos by Chris Fritchie

ing that is anything but energy efficient takes extra time and money on the front end, but reaps significant monetary benefits in the long run. "We tried to use plenty of windows and doors to make the house feel open and light," explains Mr. Messina. "At the same time we had to think of energy efficiency, so we made sure as many of them as possible are protected by a roofed porch."

Each window contains argon gas, a non-toxic inert gas that increases insulation between two panes of glass. In addition to the gas in the windows and French doors, the Messinas also installed radiant barrier. During the summer months this extra layer of insulation reflects heat back outside and limits the amount of heat coming in through the walls. During the winter it reverses the action, returning heat back into the house. A tankless water heater was also installed to increase energy efficiency. The combination of these changes can lower energy bills by 40 percent.

ENJOYING THE EXPERIENCE

When asked what they liked most about creating something new out of the old house, Mr. Messina does not hesitate. "The best part of the project was definitely designing the kitchen," he says. "We have a very modern kitchen with all the bells and whistles, but we were able to paint all the cabinets to reflect the older look of the home."

What did they dislike the most about the overall process? "All the time it took to get things done!" But, on the upside, Bob Messina feels that he knows every nook and cranny of the little house on Elm Street. If any problems arise, he'll be ready. "I know what is behind every wall and under every floor," he says. "It makes troubleshooting a piece of cake!"

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