



Layers of history

Because the exterior of this landmark home could not be altered, the interior layout had to be reshuffled around the existing windows

In many remodeling projects, when the internal layout of the home needs to be completely reorganized, changes can also be made to the exterior facade.

However, when a landmark home in a historic neighborhood has an exterior that can't be changed, the project is likely to be a challenge. Architect Claudia Skylar faced this issue when she was called on to restore a home originally

designed in 1886 by respected Chicago architect William Le Baron Jenney (1832-1907).

"The property had been run as a boarding house for many years and was in a very dilapidated condition," says the architect.

"Restoring it was an interesting puzzle. State bylaws meant that we had to retain the exterior exactly as it was, without moving or adding

windows, or altering the roofline. So, to create an environment better suited to a modern family lifestyle, we had to reorganize the interior layout of the house around the existing exterior," says Skylar.

A few minor changes to the outside were permitted, allowing the architect to add extra windows to the back corner and side wall not visible from the street.

Facing page: This landmark home was originally designed by William Le Baron Jenney, founder of the Chicago School of Architecture, and a pioneer in the design of skyscrapers such as the Home Insurance Building.

Above: Architect Claudia Skylar was asked to restore the ex-boarding house and remodel the interior to create a family home. As very few alterations to the exterior were allowed, the interior had to be planned around existing windows.



Reorganizing the interior to create a contemporary family home in a Victorian building – without losing the original flavor – was the first stage of the project, says Skylar.

“Our design had to take account of the owners’ collection of modern British art; they also wanted to be able to include some antique furniture pieces that were family heirlooms. Our aim was to create

Facing page: Large bay windows and doors connect this living area to the garden.

Top: A series of comfortable living spaces flows through the ground floor. Cased openings provide some separation between areas, without obstructing the visual connections through the spaces.

Above: The subdued wall colors complement the owners’ art and antiques.



Above: An informal dining area is adjacent to the kitchen. A hallway close to the kitchen leads to the formal dining room and to a small scullery or catering kitchen.

Facing page: Rift-sawn white oak cabinetry on the island is stained gray to match the Carrara marble countertop. Cabinetry around the perimeter of the kitchen has a natural finish, and CaesarStone countertops in a concrete color provide a practical surface.

an interior that provided a bridge between the Victorian era of the house, the modern art and the needs of a family with teens," says the architect.

Skylar describes the result as a minimalist Victorian decor. Original doors, architraves and scotias were retained or replicated, but most are painted for a more subtle effect. Only the doors, joinery and decorative paneling in the entrance hall

and on the original staircase were stained.

"These particular features are so beautiful that they are really pieces of sculpture in their own right," she says.

Interior designer Karen Mozer worked with the owners to select colors that were a subdued version of a classic Chicago decor from the early 20th century.

"The pale blues, yellows,

greens, ochers and rusts are airy and ethereal. They highlight the beautiful windows and the architecture of the home, and create the comfortable, informal and relaxed atmosphere that the owners wanted," says Mozer.

"These soft colors allow the artworks to be the primary focus of the decor," says one of the owners.

To modernize the layout





of the interior, the ground floor was opened up to create a series of living spaces. These extend from the entrance hall at the front of the house to the kitchen at the back, and all flow smoothly into each other. Cased openings between these areas hint at separate spaces, but without creating visual interference.

"These openings are a device to establish a connection

between the original Victorian house and the contemporary lifestyle of the owners," says the architect.

Children's bedrooms and bathrooms and a guest suite are on the middle level, as well as a casual family room and a separate homework space for the children.

At the top of the house, a master bedroom suite and home office were tucked under

the eaves of the old attic. The turret on the same level had only one small dormer window, which could not be altered, so it has become a bathroom, with a large tub as a centerpiece. To enable guests and family members to use this room, it can be accessed from both the master suite and hall.

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Facing page: Lead glass windows, turned balustrades and decorative paneling in the entrance hall and staircase were all restored when this 120-year-old home was remodeled. The formal dining room opens off the entrance hall.

Above: A small family living room was added to the middle level of the house. Decorative trim around windows was retained, but painted for a more subtle look.



Above: In line with state bylaws, the exterior of the house could not be altered, so the turret, with low eaves and only one small dormer window, became a bathroom. Soft green mosaic tiles on the floor and pale green walls create a calm and relaxing ambiance.

Facing page: The rest of the attic level was turned into a master suite and home office. Photographs of the family line the walls of the hallway leading to the master bedroom.

Architect: James Mastro, Claudia Skylar, Mastro & Skylar Architects (Chicago, IL)

Interior designer: Karen Mozer Architects

Kitchen design: Mastro & Skylar Architects

Builder: Joseph Delich

Siding: Existing; cedar shingles from Bradco Supply

Doors and windows: Clad double-hung from Marvin Windows

Flooring: Oak

Lighting: Recessed and track from Juno; sconces from Lightology

Paints and varnishes: Benjamin Moore

Kitchen manufacturer: Wettengel Woodworking

Cabinetry: Rift-sawn white oak with custom stain

Perimeter countertop: CaesarStone Concrete Polished

Island countertop: Dal Statuary Marble

Backsplash: Pillowed Carrara from Century Supply

Sink: Elkay Manufacturing in stainless steel from Community Home Supply

Faucets: Grohe Ladylux from Community Home Supply

Range, oven, ventilation: Wolf

Microwave: GE

Refrigeration: Sub-Zero

Dishwasher: Bosch

Waste disposal: KitchenAid

Landscaping: Maria Smithburg

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