CASTING AN OLD HOUSE IN A NEW LIGHT *From the front, John and Abby Fitzgerald's house looks much as it did 100 years ago. But in back, new French doors open to a cozy winterized house-within-a-house (facing page). At right, Abby brings in firewood, with the help of Oliver.*

A home for

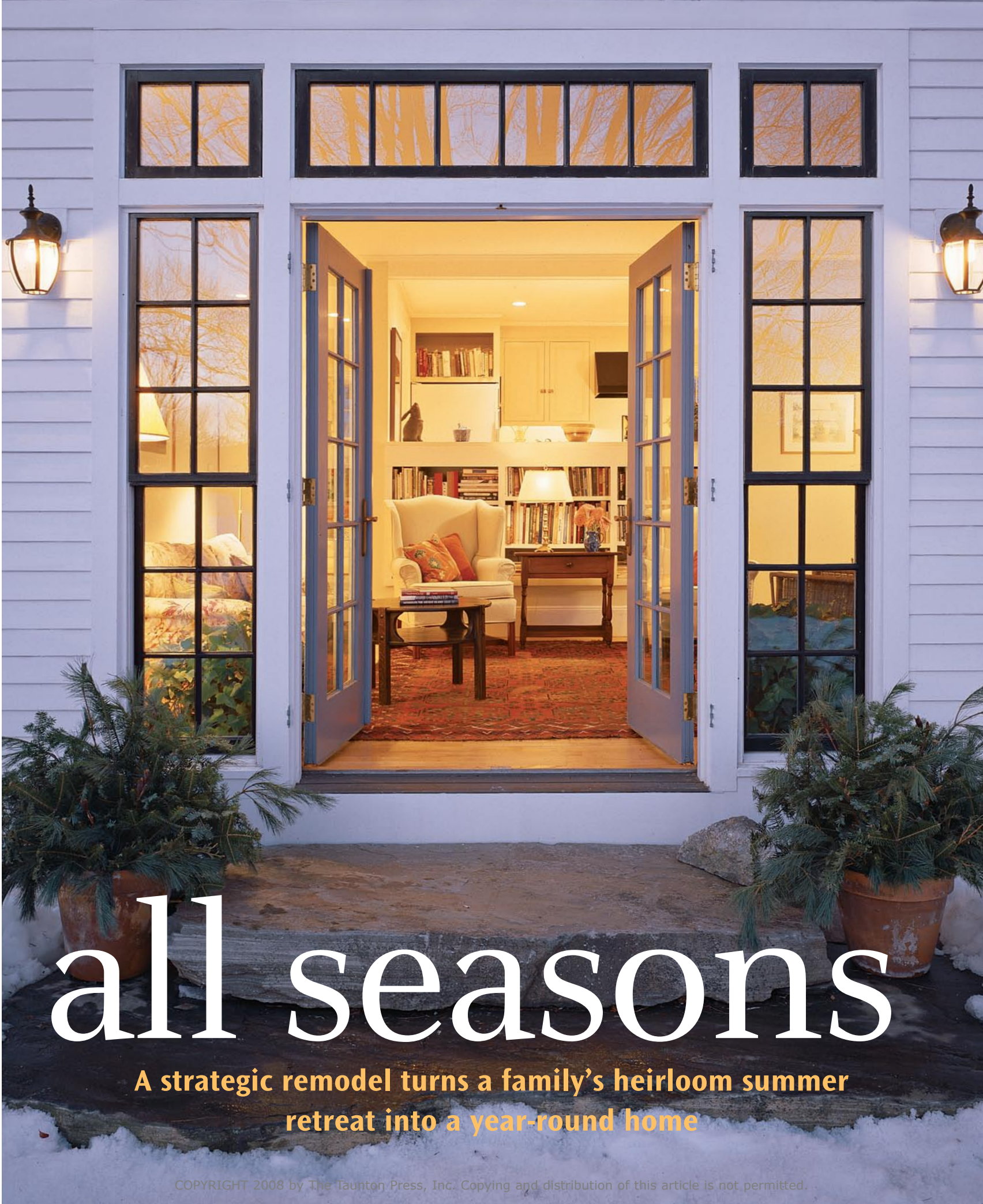
BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

From the road, the house at Blueberry Farm looks like it hasn't changed in more than a century. The only hint of difference might be the lights shining through the windows in mid-February. That's because for most of its more-than-200-year life, the white Maine farmhouse saw only summer guests.

It had always been that way until John and Abby Fitzgerald, who inherited the family retreat from her mother, made an important decision. Living several states away, they knew they couldn't afford to keep—or keep up—the place simply as a summer home. And with two of their three children already out on their own, they felt a lifestyle change was in order. The simple answer was to move to Maine and take up residence in the old house.

But the house—already 100 years old when her great-grandparents purchased it in 1896—was in no condition to shelter anyone through a New England winter. There was no insulation, and the only heat came from a 30-year-old oil burner. A large portion of

All photos: Brian Vanden Brink

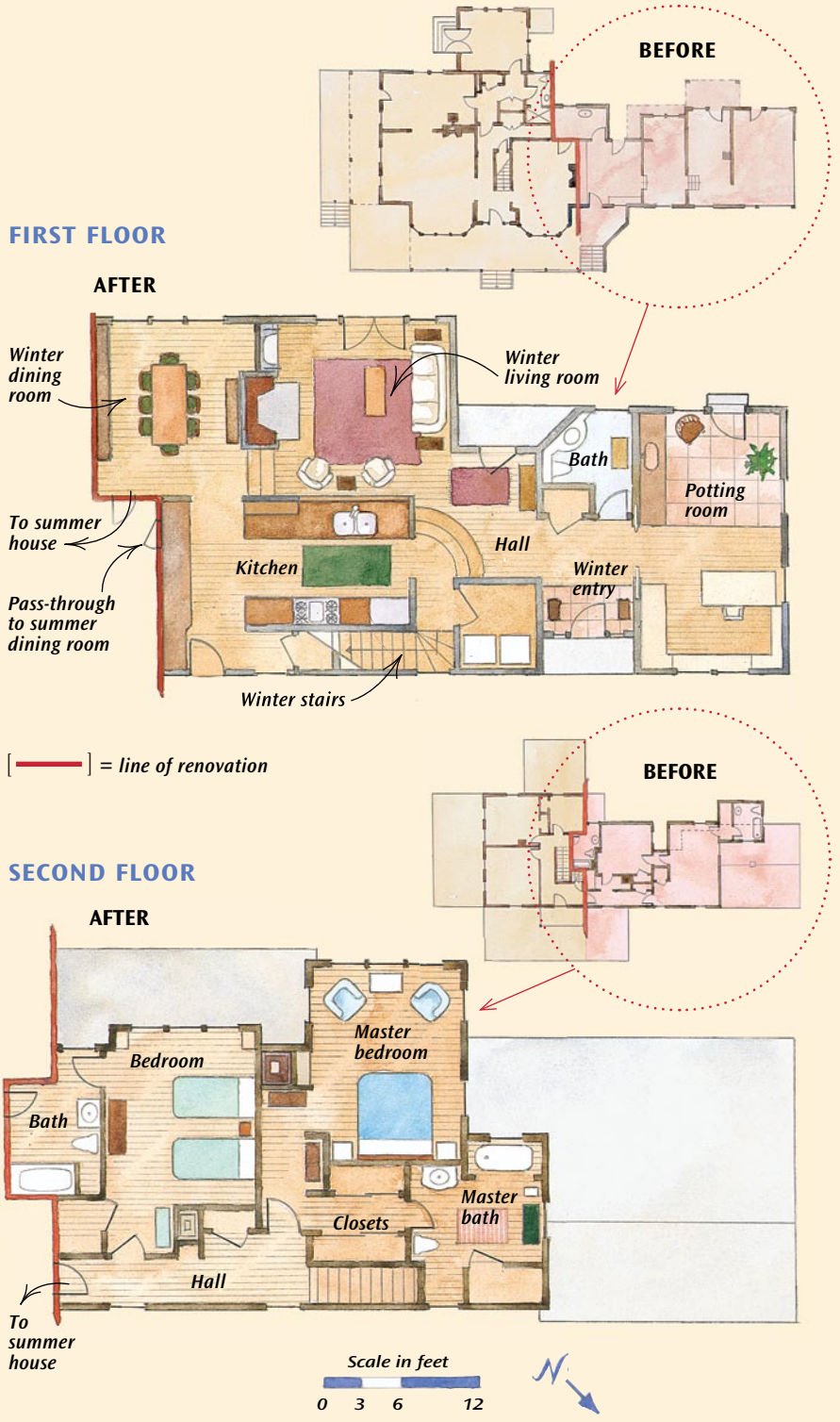


all seasons

A strategic remodel turns a family's heirloom summer retreat into a year-round home

SUMMER HOUSE, WINTER HOUSE

SINCE A WHOLE-HOUSE RENOVATION wasn't an option, the Fitzgeralds winterized only one portion of their antique summer farmhouse—a wing added in the 1800s that already housed the master bedroom and kitchen. The wing was in poor condition and had to be almost entirely rebuilt, which allowed them to widen the space from the back without dramatically altering the façade.



the house, an addition added in the late 1800s, had sunken to the ground in places. "We knew we had to make changes to make it functional," Abby says, but at the same time, she was hesitant to undertake a full-scale renovation. She knew it would it be too expensive, and she was afraid it would change the character of the house she loved so much.

But then the Fitzgeralds hit on another idea. What if they renovated only part of the house? What if within the huge summer home they created a cozy quarters they could retreat to in winter, and leave the remainder of the house for summer use? They took their idea to architect John Scholz and his wife and partner, Meg Barclay, who had seen their share of old-house renovations and knew the hazards (see sidebar, p. 34). Barclay saw virtue in the project right away. "What I love best is working with old, decrepit buildings that someone loves," she says. "It's not pure historical preservation but rather reinvigorating a house." She was also intrigued by the concept of condensing your living space to meet your needs. "This house project asked the question, How much space do you really need? As architects, we see people create these huge spaces. But do we really need all that space, all the time?"

A winter haven within a summer space

The summer house at Blueberry Farm is straight from the pages of a 19th-century novel. A large living room filled with antiques and dressed with stately moldings, an intimate back parlor, a gracious dining room, and a tall staircase leading to a half-dozen bedrooms on the second and third floors. An ell added in the mid-1800s housed the utility areas: a kitchen, a butler's pantry, a laundry room, a breakfast room for servants, and an ice room, with two bedrooms and a bath above.

Because it already contained the kitchen and master bedroom, the "new" wing was selected for full-year living. To make that possible, the team decided to set up the kitchen to function year-round, convert the old pantry to a small dining room for winter use, and borrow space from the breakfast room to make a sitting room in summer and a living room in winter.

Floor plans: Beverley Bozarth Colgan

They'd turn the old ice room into a combination potting room and office. Upstairs, the Fitzgeralds planned a room for their teenaged daughter and a master suite for them, bringing the old master bath, which had been attached oddly onto the exterior at some point, inside.

Since the front door and center stairway were in the old part of the house, the architects had to find room for a "winter" stairway to provide access to the bedrooms, as well as a "winter" front door. They carved room for the stairs out of the kitchen and turned a sliding shed door on the wing into a new winter front door. Last, they devised insulated interior panels that provide a weather seal in winter and fit them behind doors leading to the summer section.

***THE KITCHEN** was left in its original location and remains about the same size, but one big difference is the new wide opening it shares with the winter living room. A Dutch-door-style pass-through connects the kitchen to the summer dining room (left). To keep the cherry countertops looking good, John refinishes them regularly, and Abby uses cutting boards religiously.*

"If you're creative, you can make a home even with a modest plan

LOWERED FLOORS AND ROUNDED STAIRS *make the rooms of the winterized portion of the house feel spacious, despite their tight dimensions (above). Matching the maple floors and trim helps keep the rooms in harmony with the older part, where a portrait of Abby's grandmother (right) resides above an antique desk she gave her granddaughter.*

Comprising small rooms, the remodeled portion added up to less than half the size of the original, but that didn't bother Abby. "In winter, especially, small spaces give you a feeling of security," she says. "Big spaces are wonderful when you have a lot of people around. That's why I love opening up the summer house. When we take down those winter panels, there's a great sense of freedom, but in the wintertime, I love being in a small space."

But there was one thing she was adamant about: that the exterior of the house, as seen from the road, remain unchanged. It would mean some compromises, but Abby felt that strongly about it.

comfortable and gracious and a small budget."

—Meg Barclay

A renovation becomes a reconstruction

Almost as soon as work began, the architects realized there was little of the "new" wing worth saving. "We would have had to add so much wood to make it structurally sound that it was more cost-effective to do it from scratch," Barclay said. "Sometimes it's worth going through the effort [to save the shell], but there was nothing terribly charming in this wing—it had been completely utilitarian."

There was a bright side, however. Reconstructing the wing allowed them to widen that portion of the house several feet in the back, providing additional room while keeping with Abby's mandate that the front of the house remain undisturbed. Leaving only the front shell intact, the building team demolished and reconstructed everything behind it, increasing the total living space to about 2,100 square feet and adding rear windows and doors that opened up a view of the fields behind the house.

"We could have gone hog wild, and we would have had more room,"

***REMINDERS** of the farm's rural roots include Abby's collection of floral frogs (right) and skeins of yarn (above) from the alpacas she raises on the property.*

SMALL ROOMS CAN LIVE LARGE

THOUGH THE ROOMS ARE RELATIVELY SMALL, Meg Barclay and John Scholz used several strategies to make the Fitzgeralds' winter quarters feel spacious and inviting.

ADDING VIEWS Abby enjoys the large French doors that open the winter living room to backyard views—and make taking the Christmas tree in and out a lot easier. An open pass-through between the kitchen and the living room (photo above) lets the cook enjoy the view as well.

CREATING HIGH CEILINGS Measuring only 13 feet square, the winter living room feels more spacious with a 9-foot 6-inch ceiling. To provide this without raising the roofline, the architects dropped the floor into an existing crawl space, placing the living room 18 inches below the level of the main house, the kitchen, and the winter dining room. This lower level also extends into the winter entryway, powder room, and office/potting room. Upstairs, they gave the master bedroom the same spacious feel by eliminating the attic and creating a cathedral ceiling.

ROUNDING THE STAIRS The curved steps that rise from the lowest level to the kitchen can be accessed from two directions, making the space less tunnellike.

TUCKING IN BUILT-INS A built-in beside the fireplace hides the TV, and a bookcase recessed beneath the kitchen pass-through not only saves living room space but also gives Abby a countertop that's 39 inches deep rather than the standard 24.

INSULATING OLD HOUSES CAN BE TRICKY

HAD THE FITZGERALDS decided to winterize their entire house, they might have been placing its old plaster walls in jeopardy. In old homes built without insulation or efficient vapor barriers, moisture from the inside of the house migrates freely though the walls. But pump insulation behind old plaster walls, and the moisture gets trapped inside, leading to rot and mold. "This is also why vinyl siding on an old house is so bad. It's like wrapping it with a giant plastic sheet," says Meg Barclay.

If you want to insulate a vintage home without tearing out its plaster walls, Barclay suggests painting the interior plaster face of the exterior walls and top floor ceiling with a vapor-barrier primer and using blown-in fiberglass rather than cellulose insulation (when wet, the latter can provide a food source for mold).

***BUMP-OUTS AND ADDITIONAL WINDOWS** on the back of the house bring more space and light to the "winter" section without changing the front façade.*

Abby says. "But I didn't want to change the appearance of the house. The only place we took the liberty of doing that was in the back."

Making the new look old

Though they replaced the structure of the wing and reconfigured the spaces, the team preserved the vintage feel of the home by recycling fixtures and materials salvaged from this and other parts of the house. "I wanted to use as many of the old fixtures as possible," says Abby. So a huge copper sink from the butler's pantry was installed in the potting room, and other vintage bath fixtures, including an old clawfoot tub, were re-installed in the master bath. To maintain continuity with the original house, they repeated its materials in the new addition, remounting old doors and laying new maple flooring to match the old.

The critical difference, however, between the new winter quarters and the old summer portion was the installation of an efficient heating system. In this case, the architects selected radiant in-floor heating. Virtually

***AN OLD COPPER SINK** from the butler's pantry was reinstalled in the potting room.*

invisible, the in-floor heat not only eliminates the need for modern vents or baseboards, but also provides a draft-free, even source of warmth. "It's the most comfortable for this environment," says Barclay.

In one of the few changes to the front of the house, the architects created a recessed winter entrance to the remodeled wing where a sliding door into the laundry had once stood. In another instance, Abby's determination to preserve the houses' façade led to a less seamless arrangement—a kitchen window orphaned beneath the winter stairway.

"If I hadn't been so emotionally attached I might have done things differently," Abby says. "I wanted to keep as much of the past as I could, which is both good and bad. But I'm comfortable with the way the house works. It works well for two of us, and it works well when we've got a crowd."

As they do when the weather warms and the insulated panels come down. "When the family starts arriving in June, the house takes on a whole different feel, much like when I came here with my children and was welcomed by my mother," Abby says. "I know she would have been pleased with what we have done."

Debra Judge Silber is an associate editor.

For more information, see Resources, page 84.

***A VINTAGE TUB** in the master bathroom was among fixtures the Fitzgeralds were able to recycle.*

HOW MUCH SPACE DO YOU REALLY NEED?

SHELTER-RELATED EXPENSES (mortgage/rent, utilities, insurance, maintenance, property taxes, etc.) command the lion's share of most people's budgets. So determine your true needs before embarking on a costly enterprise. Here are a few questions we encourage our clients to consider.

What is this room for, and is it really going to be used? How many dining rooms gather dust while family and guests congregate in the kitchen? How many living rooms sit idle because they are too far from the action? How many guest rooms are used once or twice a year? Examine your notions about single-function rooms. Determine if you will truly use and enjoy these spaces or if you just think society expects you to provide them.

What activities can be combined to make the greatest use of space? Wherever activities can use the same rather than separate spaces, square footage is saved. Activities that relate to each other in some way make natural pairings. A laundry combines easily with a mudroom. A home office can double as a guest room. A master bath or master bedroom may serve you well as an exercise area. How you live will determine what combinations work for you.

Is this to be a house or a warehouse? Do you want to use your precious space to house clothing you never wear, holiday dishes you use once a year, books you'll never refer to again, or five sets of sheets for each bed? Pare down your possessions and you will probably find you don't need as big a kitchen, closet, garage, or library as you thought.

—Meg Barclay