

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

Updating Classic America Bungalows

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From a Frog to a Prince



ABOVE AND FACING PAGE, Bungalows often have an appealingly tactile quality, drawing on rough stucco or smooth river-washed stone or thick wood shingles—real materials from real, identifiable places. One of the delights about this style is that all the houses look as if they have a story to tell—and the setting in which to tell it.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO A CLASSIFIED AD describing a Bungalow as, “Not for the faint hearted...needs lots of work...classic old-world charmer with potential to be fabulous”?

Gary and Beth jumped at the opportunity to transform this frog of a Bungalow, listed in a Seattle newspaper, back into a prince. As a contractor, Gary was particularly interested in the home’s resale potential—the neighborhood’s properties were appreciating in value because of their location and their particularly fine craftsmanship. But when Gary showed the house to Beth, she saw more than a real estate investment, and they agreed that this could be their new home. They had been looking for a traditional house that could accommodate their modern lifestyle, and Gary, as both a visionary and a romantic, wasn’t discouraged by the fact that the 1912 structure needed a great deal of work.

Taking It Down to the Studs

The rooms were filthy, thanks in part to a major rodent infestation. The smell was so noxious that the house had to be treated with the procedures used to remove odor from fire and smoke damage—it was gutted down to the studs, stripped of all paint, and sprayed with a shellac-based primer.



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The Handmade House

ACCORDING TO A CARPENTER who remodeled our Bungalow, the original builder must have had one arm shorter than the other because dimensions are consistently smaller by the same measure left of center. We are reminded on a daily basis that individuals built these older homes.

This is one reason we recommend that you hire craftspeople who have experience with the unpredictability of Bungalows. Old houses settle over time and rarely is anything square. Working on them is similar to learning a foreign language, in that it takes a while to become fluent and to understand the idioms. Even demolition is different in older homes. When we tore away the downstairs walls in our Bungalow, we found just what we expected—wood lath and plasterboard, an early version of drywall. Upstairs, we got a big surprise when the sledgehammer bounced off the wall. After prying the wall open with a crowbar, we found horsehair insulation, wood lath wrapped with wire turkey mesh (larger than chicken wire), and a type of rubble that we still can't identify.

A few happy surprises turned up during the process of deconstructing the house. Twin windows were discovered on either side of the fireplace, where they had been concealed for years within the walls. In the dining room, a dropped acoustic-tile ceiling was torn down to reveal the original beams. It took a worker more than two weeks to strip the paint from the woodwork in the dining room alone, revealing the beautiful grain of the Northwest fir. Fortunately, the plate rail and built-in sideboard were in salvageable shape. Replacements for the damaged woodwork had to be milled on site because the profile (the shape, in cross section) wasn't commercially available. Gradually, the dining room was returned to its original quiet grandeur, with the beams overhead, stained-wood cabinetry and flooring, and the choice of a particularly rich hue of paint.

The **Art Deco** brick fireplace in the living room didn't fit the **Craftsman** image that Gary and Beth wanted. They chose to replace it with one of stone, adding a custom fir mantel. A family portrait hangs above the fireplace with honey-toned fir paneling as a

Art Deco—A style that became popular after the Bungalow appeared, characterized by gracefully streamlined shapes and the decorative use of glass and chrome.





backdrop. Built-in bookshelves were fitted into the spaces on either side of the fireplace, no doubt replacing units that long ago had been removed.

Gary had in mind that the living room would be for daily family use—reading, talking, gathering—and he was careful not to overwhelm the space with too much dark wood. The white trim bounces available natural light into the room. When doing a restoration, restraint is important. Slavish attention to faithful details can give a house a themed look that doesn't feel authentic. Remember, Bungalows were originally built to accommodate the way people actually live, not to impress the neighbors.

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE, There seem to be two categories of prospective Bungalow owners. One hopes to walk into a house with a dining room just like the one shown above, with beautiful woodwork, ceiling beams, period lighting, and authentic built-ins. The other would prefer to stumble upon a project like the “before” photo of this same dining room, shown on the facing page, because they prefer a hands-on challenge.

Craftsman — Another term for the Arts and Crafts movement, which favored a handmade aesthetic with simple materials over mass production.



The kitchen is usually the most challenging room in a renovation because most of us want to have a balance between old and new features. Here, up-to-date appliances nestle into a warm, traditional kitchen with lots of varnished wood, fluted face frames on the base cabinets, warm-hued cork flooring, and pendant lights.



Converting Three Rooms into One

The old kitchen and a mudroom were combined to create a large, new kitchen with a dining booth. The kitchen has the modern conveniences you'd expect to find in a remodeled home, while retaining a quiet, pedigreed look in part due to the care taken with natural materials—a cork-tile floor, wood cabinetry with glass doors, and decorative tile. The windows above the sink look similar to the double-hungs elsewhere in the room, but they are two-paned **casements** that can easily be opened with a crank. The wall cabinets are capped in a way that resembles the window frames, reinforcing the impression that the kitchen needed only minor refurbishing rather than a complete reconstruction. Even the lighting looks convincingly backdated; the suspended lamps resemble old industrial fixtures, with their ribbed-glass domes.

casements — Windows that hinge and open at the side.



ABOVE, This living room was gutted down to the studs, leaving the owners free to interpret the room rather than recreate what existed before. A new Arts and Crafts–influenced fireplace replaced the Art Deco original.



LEFT, Doing household chores shouldn't mean being isolated in the dreariest parts of the home. Instead of lugging laundry down to the basement, this family located the machines in a large kitchen closet. Cleaning materials are placed on shelves high above a child's reach.



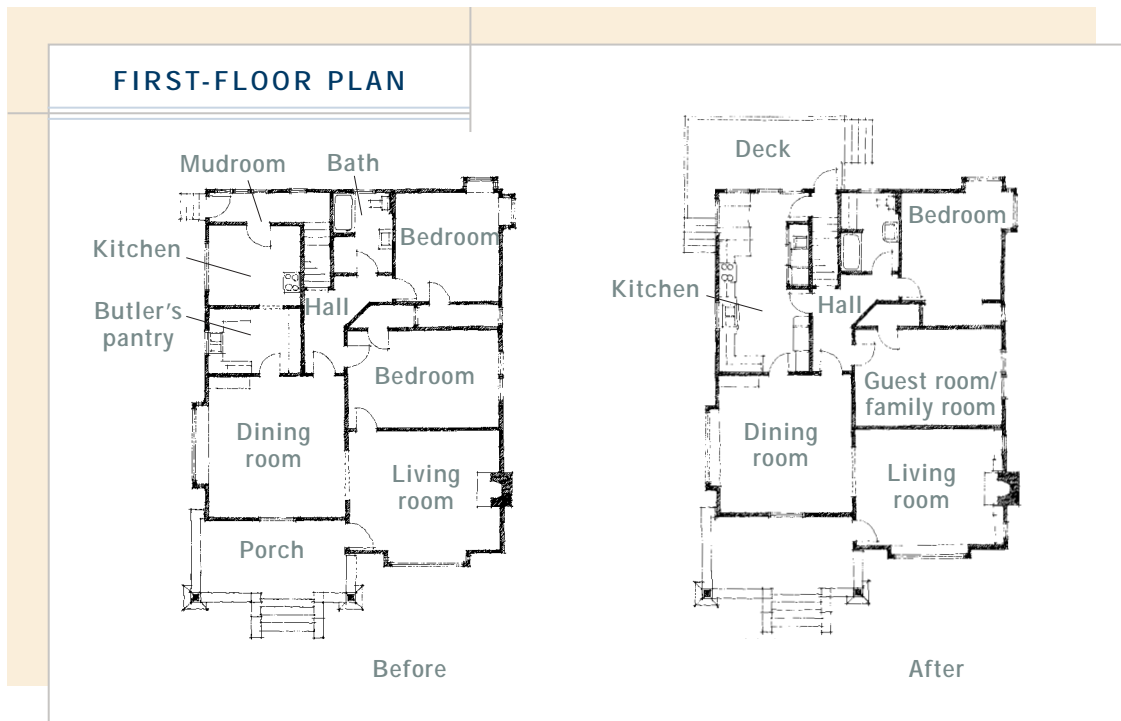
Little breakfast nooks are standard features in many original Bungalow kitchens. This nook combines coziness with efficiency. The seats can be lifted for access to extra-deep storage areas, just right for stowing silver that is used three times a year or coloring books and crayons for a rainy day.

The L shape of the base cabinets creates a nook for the booth. Its high-backed benches have the delicate detailing of an old-fashioned porch or of arbor benches found in gardens in the early 1900s. The table between them is wall supported, and the absence of legs makes it easier to slide in and out of the booth. Lift the upholstered seats and there is handy storage space below. The washer and dryer are nearby but kept out of sight behind a trio of five-panel sliding doors.

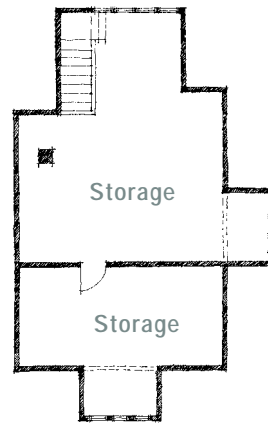
A new back porch is a couple of steps beyond the booth (see the photo on p. 58). Care was taken to give added importance to its appearance so that it looks far more like an extension of the house than a deck would have. The caps on the posts look like proper hats, and the rails work to form a wooden screen.



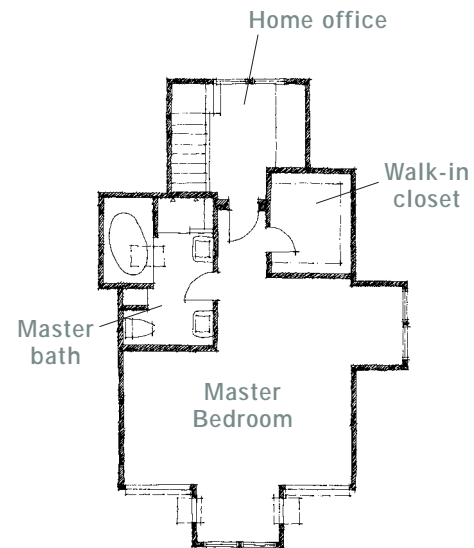
Built-up woodwork can have a quietly grand effect, even though the materials aren't particularly exotic or expensive. Here, the entry to a bedroom has been trimmed with traditional panels on either side of the passageway and overhead.



SECOND-FLOOR PLAN



Before



After

Neighborhood Relations

FITTING IN

☆ **A FULL-SCALE REMODELING** can be somewhat stressful to your next-door neighbors. You can help by telling them about your renovation plans, including when construction trucks will start appearing and when they will disappear. It's also important to talk with your contractors before the project begins to let them know what might not be acceptable in your neighborhood—for example, playing loud music, taking up the parking spaces along the street, and allowing refuse from the construction site to blow into adjacent yards. Make sure that the demolition dumpster is parked in front of *your* house, not someone else's. You may want to consider renting a portable toilet for the construction workers, if allowed by your municipality. And then, when the workers pack up and go away, why not invite the neighbors over to show off your house and thank them for their goodwill?

Harvesting Space

Compared with the appetite for square footage evident in today's homes, Bungalow owners of yesteryear appear to have been on a diet. The original owners of this house lived in less than 900 sq. ft. of finished space. Gary and Beth's plans included creating a master suite on the second floor and converting the basement into a home office. They now have over 3,000 sq. ft. of living space, all within the envelope.

As with the kitchen, the reconfigured second floor looks more like a faithful restoration than brand-new construction. The detailing in the bedrooms is simpler than in the public rooms downstairs. Gary kept the woodwork understated, with a painted finish, but the trim is more involved than you'd find in a typical spec house. Homeowners usually place storage (lots of it) at the top of their wish lists when planning a remodel, and Gary took advantage of the knee walls to carve out bookcases and two rolling linen-storage units that slide out of the wall.



The master bedroom is large enough to accommodate several over-size pieces of furniture, allowing the owners to use this space for cocooning, conversation, and comfort.



Every old house requires maintenance...just to keep up. To reuse these original windows, they had to be removed, stripped, planed, caulked, painted, and reinstalled with modern weatherstripping.

The master bath is a far cry from the strictly functional, antiseptic baths of early Bungalows. Mottled green tiles shimmer under the skylight. The wainscoting is topped by a generous shelf for more storage space. The oversize tub has been placed under an eave with a skylight carved into it, for the luxurious experience of bathing in the sunlight.

The landing is flooded with light and fresh air from four casement windows at one **gable end**. The spot was too attractive to treat as a hall, and the couple decided to use the niche for a home office, conveniently placed and yet out of sight from the relaxed environment of the living and dining rooms.

Gary's business office is now in the basement, sparing him a drive to work on many mornings. "It's nice to hear the kids playing in the backyard and great to be able to spend some time with them occasionally during the day," Gary says, "and my commute can't be beat."

Consider the Basement

DEPENDING ON what part of the country you live in, your Bungalow may or may not have a basement waiting to be exploited. Bungalow basements were not designed as additional living space, but then neither were the unfinished attics in many of these homes. If you want to squeeze out more living space from a Bungalow, the basement may be ripe for the plucking. There are several things you should consider, however, before investing any money.

First, how dry is your basement? If you've noticed standing water from rain or melting snow even once a year, we suggest you consider abandoning your plans.

What is the intended use? Basements are particularly suited to a new darkroom, entertainment center,

wine cellar, laundry room, or woodworking shop because these will need little if any natural light.

Finally, will it be legal to expand into the basement? Codes may require that there be more than one exit from that level. And if you plan to use the basement as a bedroom or an office, there also may be requirements for window size, even if you aren't discouraged by the possibility that light may be limited.

Don't overlook the potential advantages. Because basements are surrounded by earth, they are relatively easy to heat and shouldn't need cooling in summer. And this new space is relatively inexpensive because any remodeling that doesn't involve a new foundation will cost you less per square foot than an addition.



Sometimes the room itself will give you a clue as to how it wants to turn out. When the chimney was removed from the old furnace in this house, a large hole was created in the roof. Rather than shingle over the area, the owners decided it was the perfect space to locate a skylight, right above the new whirlpool bath.

gable end — A side of the house showing the triangular top story, rather than a pitch of the roof.