



AFTER

# Colonial

# Transformation



BEFORE

## BEST REMODEL

Our 2017 Best Remodel Award goes to Mark Larson and Kari Nelson of Rehkamp Larson Architects. The Minneapolis team skillfully turned a ubiquitous and outdated colonial home into something fresh and timeless with updated finishes, inviting spaces, better flow, and a stronger connection to the beautiful backyard that had long been disengaged from the interior.





## Improved flow, more natural light, and a connection to the outdoors modernize a creekside Minnesota home

BY ANATOLE BURKIN

All too often, older homes have weathered multiple renovations, leaving them clunky in appearance and congested in flow. These were the issues facing Dave and Kara Walter, the owners of a dated colonial home in Edina, Minnesota. The house was fragmented—too many doorways and multiple level changes impeded flow. Plus, there were missed opportunities. For example, the house’s design pinched the gorgeous views of its creekside setting.

Architects Mark Larson and Kari Nelson of Rehkamp Larson Architects were hired to address the shortcomings. The homeowners wanted to smooth over the rough edges, open up the transitions between living spaces, add extra room to accommodate their three children, and better integrate the home with its surroundings. “Our goal was to put together a thoughtful design to make the most of the bones and form of the existing house and reconnect it to the beautiful site,” said Larson. The planned improvements would offer more daylight, better views of the creek, additional space where needed for circulation and function, and an overall refresh.

### Better connections, inside and out

Larson knew it was most important to reduce the sense of disconnection between rooms, levels, and outdoor space caused by narrow doorways and multiple levels added in previous remodels. This turned out to be an extensive refresh. On the exterior, Larson and Nelson replaced all the windows and siding, reworked the outdoor patio in the front yard, and added a new terrace on the back of the house. Inside, they gutted and reorganized about 80% of the home, making use of existing square footage and adding as needed.

The most significant floor-plan change was establishing the kitchen as the center of the house. This was done by expanding it toward the creek; opening it to the living room, family room, and front hall; and connecting it to the deck.

The architects added about 130 sq. ft. to the kitchen and dining room, providing space for a proper island and the ability to rotate the dining table for better views and improved circulation. The lower level gained about 350 sq. ft. of room.

The architects modified level changes in the house in many locations and in different ways depending on the situation. On the main floor, they reduced level changes between the living room, family room, and kitchen by raising the floor of the family room. On the upper level, they relocated the stairs to the master bedroom around the corner, providing a better sense of privacy from the hallway. They also eliminated the



step down into the side bedroom, making this room feel more connected to the upper hall. They added steps to the exterior, easing circulation and more directly connecting the house, deck, and patio to the backyard.

To improve flow, Larson and Nelson made openings throughout the house wider and/or taller and in some cases added new openings where there had previously been none. They widened, raised, and then trimmed the opening between the front hall and the living room to feel native to the original house. They also widened family-room doorways connecting to the kitchen and living room and added a new opening and stair between the kitchen and the living room. In one case, they removed a wall between the kitchen and the front hall entirely.

Natural lighting received a lot of attention too. The team added windows on all three levels of the house, providing additional daylight and improved views of the site, especially in the living room and master bedroom.

### The builder's challenges

Expanding interior spaces in an existing home usually requires new bearing walls, and this project was no exception. Nathan Christenson of Dovetail Renovation was hired to bring the drawings to life.

“The biggest structural challenge was supporting the second level above the kitchen while we replaced the bearing wall beneath with a large steel beam,” said Christenson.

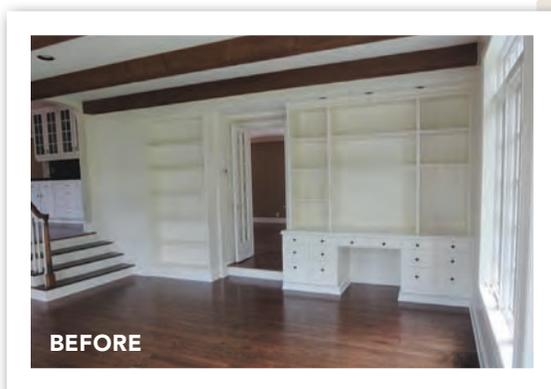
The site presented logistical challenges as well. Extending the kitchen and dining room



**SAME ROOMS**

## BETTER FLOW

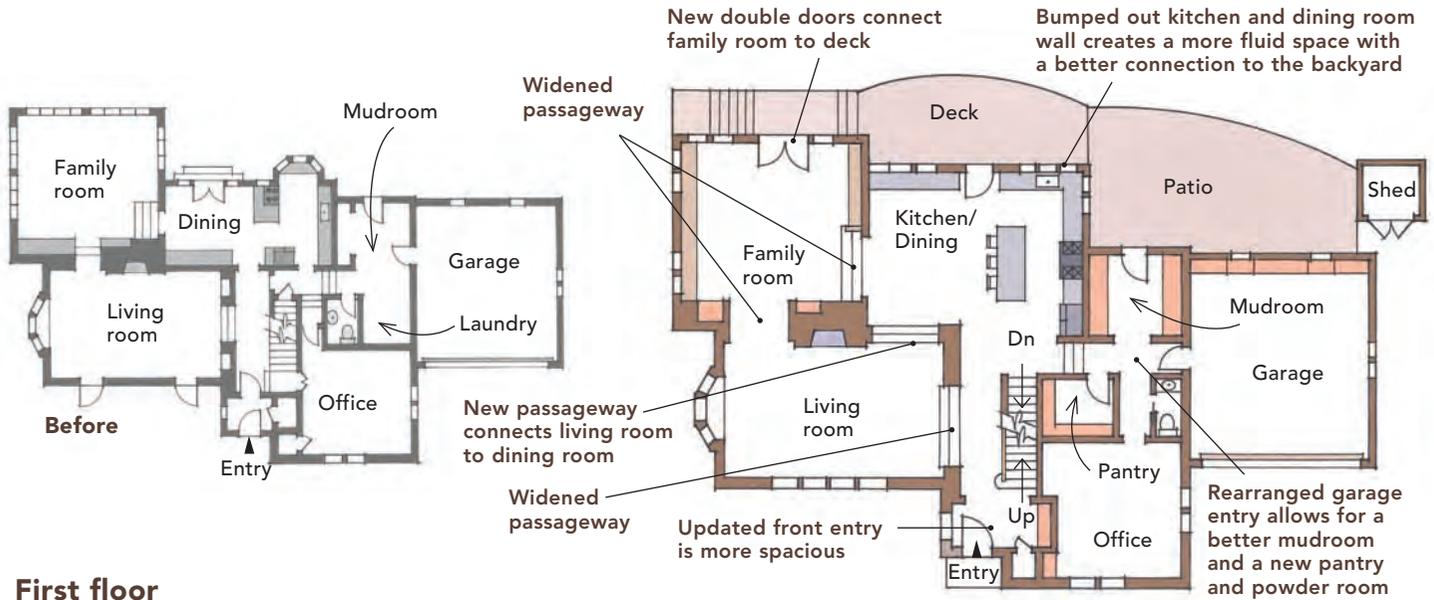
The enhanced connection between the family room and dining room shows how widened passageways eliminate congestion and improve sightlines. The raised family-room floor minimizes the height of the transition and the wide and deep stair treads also smooth the impact of the change in level. This was the theme throughout the remodel: Small renovations and additions improve flow, views, privacy, and function.



**BEFORE**

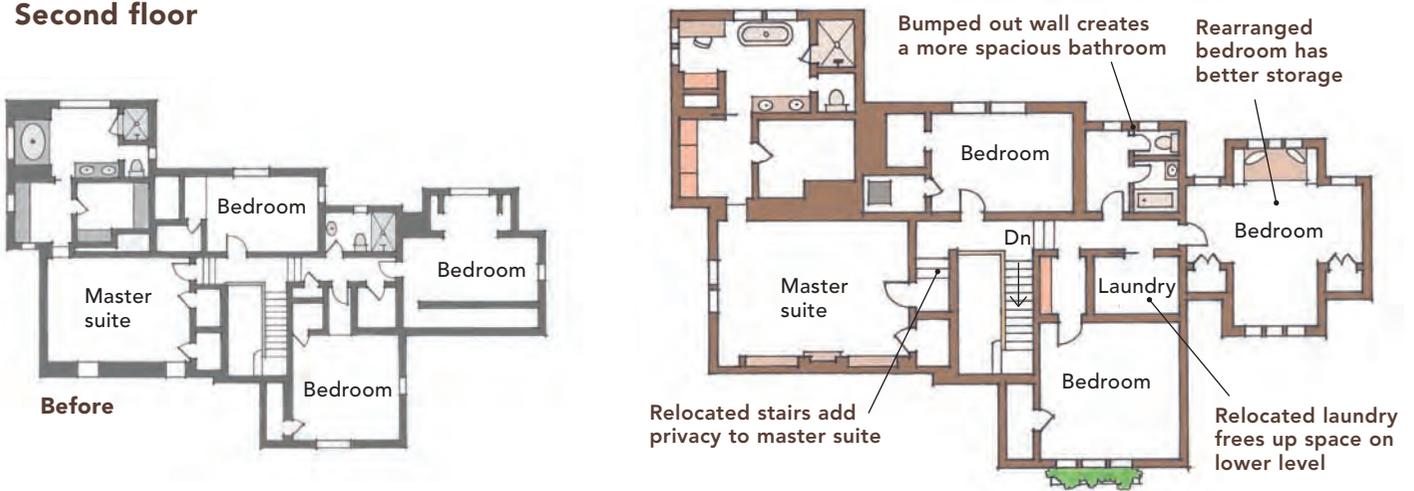
**Natural light abounds.** An enlarged paneled passageway between the family room and living room allows natural light to flow freely between the spaces where new and larger windows were added. The new built-ins are updated in style, but still in keeping with the existing character of the home.





### First floor

### Second floor



Note: New lower level not shown.



### SPECS

- Bedrooms:** 5
- Bathrooms:** 3½
- Size before remodel:** 3,700 sq. ft.
- Size of remodeled space:** 4,800 sq. ft.
- Completed:** 2015
- Location:** Edina, Minn.
- Architect:** Mark Larson, AIA, and Kari Nelson, AIA, Rehkamp Larson Architects, rehkamplarson.com
- Builder:** Dovetail Renovation, dovetailrenovation.com
- Interior design:** Martha Dayton Design, marthadaytondesign.com
- Landscape design:** DIG Garden Design, diggardendesign.com



**Kitchen transition.** Bumping out the kitchen's exterior wall gave extra space to improve the function and flow of the kitchen. Its transitional style blends traditional and modern elements, while the large corner windows enhance the views.

toward the creek required Christenson's team to do some extensive excavation on the back side of the house. The space they had to work in was extremely tight. The path to the backyard was just big enough to drive a small excavator through.

"We had to back ourselves out from digging the basement game room in order to keep our excavator from falling into the creek," said Christenson.

### Modern touches in a classic home

Martha Dayton was charged with completing the transition from an improved house to an inviting home. The Minneapolis interior designer and her co-designer, Kelly Perry, kept the style of the house true to the original character and updated the finishes while remaining sensitive to the age of the home. The house is now elegant and rich with texture while still being a space where three young children can feel comfortable. Dayton and Perry designed spaces for the kids specifically and spaces for the family as a whole, which was extremely important to the owners. They used mostly cool colors balanced by the warmth of the wood floors and the textures in the fabrics.

The dining room is an example of the designers' practical yet elegant approach to decorating. It has a table that works for everyday use with stylish wishbone chairs and a spectacular Ochre light fixture that gives the room its personality. According to Dayton, the living room is the most formal space of the house while still being quite casual. The blend of textures makes the room elegant yet livable. The colors and patterns are subtle, but there's plenty there for the eye to take in. "It's well-appointed but also quite curated at the same time," she said.

In the end, the effort and teamwork proved satisfying for everyone involved in the remodel. The house was skillfully transformed through architectural and interior design from a dated colonial to a visually clean, contemporary form. The many levels within the house were minimized and sometimes removed to establish a continuous feeling from room to room. Even though there are still multiple levels throughout the house, they define the rooms in a more satisfying way than the original floor plan. □

---

Anatole Burkin is a freelance writer in Santa Rosa, Calif. Photos by Steve Henke, unless otherwise noted.



## SAME SHAPES BETTER DETAILS

When a house's size and shape is already determined, remodeling is often about adjusting the massing to have better scale and proportions. In this case, the architects modified the size of windows and trim, added or changed roof lines, and updated materials to improve the design. They made some effective changes to the landscape, too. These design strategies transformed this bland and outdated colonial into a fresh, charming home.





**Playing with proportions.** New, larger windows rebalance the street-facing elevation, which seemed to lack proportion before the remodel. Doubling up the dormer windows demanded larger dormer roofs, which minimize the mass of the main roof. Extending the gable roof makes the larger triple-window arrangement feel natural and offers shelter at the front door where a hefty bracket grounds the overhang.

**Scale and siding.** The entire building was re-sided with cedar shakes. The smaller exposure of the siding makes the large home seem more in scale with its surroundings. Roofs added to the entries also break up the tall elevation while upgraded and additional windows capture light and views. The retaining wall and multilevel deck form a smoother connection to the backyard and provide an opportunity for an indoor space below that will be used as a playroom for the kids.

