

# This Old House

## SECRETS OF SMART REMODELING

- ▷ AVOID THE TOP 25 PITFALLS
- ▷ MAKE HIGH-IMPACT, LOW-COST COSMETIC CHANGES
- ▷ IMPROVE YOUR FLOOR PLAN WITHOUT ADDING ON



NEW CHOICES IN  
WOOD FLOORING  
DESIGN TIPS FOR  
BETTER CLOSETS  
WORKING SAFELY  
ON LADDERS





# A LIGHT TOUCH

RETHINKING  
A BAD '70S  
REMODEL  
CREATES  
PLENTY OF  
BRIGHT,  
OPEN SPACE

If there is a home-buyer's heaven, it must be lined with houses that are already renovated to perfectly suit a person's tastes and needs—so no one would ever have to live with a previous owner's mistakes. But back to reality—and this 1970s Cape Cod-style house, purchased 15 years ago by a ballet-school director and her dentist husband. On the plus side, it had a perfect location for the couple and their two children: sited on two wooded acres on a quiet lane, in a small town near Boston. With three bedrooms upstairs and a large family room, the house offered a more-than-adequate 2,800 square feet of space. Unfortunately, a good portion of that came from a poorly built family-room addition that formed an ell between the house and the garage and was just begging to be redeemed. [continued]

BY JILL CONNORS PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLER & KELLER  
STYLED BY EILEEN EISELE



**OPPOSITE:** Dark and dated, the old kitchen was awkwardly walled off from the eating area. **THIS PAGE:** In the light-bathed new space, an ample peninsula topped with black granite holds the cooktop and functions as a kitchen table as well. Double ovens occupy the space where a side door once stood.





**ABOVE:** An added-on family-room wing joined the original Cape Cod-style house to the garage.

**RIGHT:** A revised window scheme, gable-end finials, and yellow paint transform the renovated driveway-side facade. A new hip-roofed portico dresses up what is now the house's primary entrance.



## ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS ADD NEW CHARACTER TO THE HOUSE, INSIDE AND OUT

### AT FIRST, MAKING DO

"We hated this house in the beginning," recalls the couple. "It was brown inside and out, and felt incredibly dark." The Cape's typical small rooms and steeply pitched roof didn't let in a lot of light. And the family room's stucco walls and painted plywood ceiling gave it a slapped-together feeling. Worse, the room always felt—and smelled—damp, because its carpeting had been laid right over the concrete slab floor.

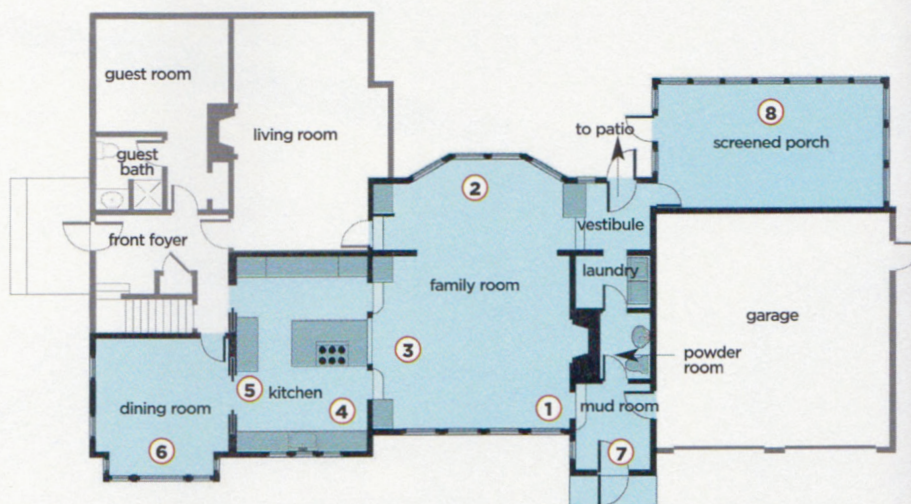
The couple took some interim measures, whitewashing the predominantly brown family room and coating the dark brown exterior with light gray paint. All the while, they kept dreaming of a different house: light, bright, and airy. After getting to know architect Lynn Hopkins, who brought her young children to the homeowner's dance school, the couple started

## What They Did

- 1 RAISED THE FLOOR** in the family room—now two steps up from the mud-room and two steps down from the kitchen.
- 2 BUMPED OUT THE FAMILY ROOM**, adding a door to the living room on one side and a vestibule leading to the new patio door on the other. A bay of windows creates a niche for a table and chairs.
- 3 ADDED A HALF-WALL** to define the kitchen entrance while preserving a feeling of openness.
- 4 CLOSED UP THE SIDE DOOR** along the kitchen's sink wall to allow for more work space and create a niche for wall ovens.
- 5 PUT IN A DOORWAY** from the kitchen into the dining room, creating sight lines from one end of the house to the other.
- 6 ADDED A BOX BAY** of windows in the dining room.
- 7 ENLARGED THE MUDROOM** and built a portico over the outside door.
- 8 ADDED A SCREENED PORCH** behind the garage.

### FIRST-FLOOR PLAN

= renovated areas and new space





**BELOW:** Dark timbers marked the entrance to the old family room, which stepped down 22 inches from the rest of the house.

**RIGHT:** Raising the floor by 11 inches eased the transition into the new kitchen. A half-wall partition keeps the sight line open and adds a nice architectural detail.



to believe that their dark Cape could be turned into the house they envisioned. "The design process evolved over several years," says Hopkins, who is based in Lexington, Massachusetts. Top requirements for the renovation: bring in more natural light, create a better traffic flow, enlarge and update the kitchen, and solve the family room's moisture problem.

#### **FIXING THE FLOW—AND MORE**

Hopkins's smart design solutions delivered a house that feels much bigger, though in fact only 319 square feet of heated space was added. The bulk of the renovation took place in the family room and kitchen, adjacent spaces that had never flowed well together, in part because of a 22-inch step-down from the main house. "The family room and a mudroom entrance off the garage had been added after the house was built," explains Hopkins. Her plan called for gutting the room and building up the floor 11 inches. "I decided to split the height difference," says Hopkins. "Before, you entered the mudroom and walked into the family room all on the same level, then stepped up four steps to the kitchen. Now, you enter the mudroom, go up two steps to the family room, then two more to the kitchen." To build up the family-room





A box bay expands the dining room by several feet and floods it with sunlight. The central fixed window has a border of 16 small lights; it is flanked by six-over-six double-hungs that complement those used throughout the original house.



floor, local contractor Halsey Platt removed the carpeting, laid a moisture barrier over the existing slab, then added sleepers, floor joists with insulation in between, and a plywood subfloor topped with red oak flooring.

To maximize the feeling of spaciousness in the family room, where the ceiling soars to a 15-foot peak, Hopkins more than doubled the number of windows. She extended one side of the room with a bay of twelve-over-one double-hungs overlooking the backyard. For the passageway from the family room to the kitchen, she devised a half-wall with steps on either side of it. This columned partition preserves a sense of openness between the two rooms while still providing some separation.

After gutting the kitchen, Hopkins gave it a new layout made possible by eliminating its chief flaw: a side door that hogged one corner of the sink wall. That gave the kitchen an extra 24 square feet—a small addition, but in a critical location. She improved the traffic flow from the kitchen to the dining room by adding a doorway between the two rooms. This opening also creates a line of sight from the dining room all the way through the kitchen to the family room and mudroom, adding to the house's newfound sense of spaciousness.



**ABOVE:** The old family room had a dreary faux-rustic look. **TOP:** A large bay of double-hungs, a small oval window, and a side-door transom give the enlarged room a bright, airy feeling, as does yellow and white paint.





#### WELL-THOUGHT-OUT ADDITIONS

While the owners wanted to retain the original Cape's New England character, the wife's Scandinavian heritage—and visits to the Swedish country home of artist Carl Larsson, often credited with popularizing the Swedish style—were also an inspiration. Architectural elements of that style include using a variety of decorative window motifs and creating niches for specific activities. An oval window, a bay of twelve-over-one double-hungs, and a three-light transom enliven the patio-side facade. Inside the family room, next to the light-filled window bay, are a table and chairs where the kids can do their homework. Finials decorating the gable ends are another Scandinavian touch.

One last feature—a brand-new screened-in porch—capitalizes on the house's woodland setting. At just over 300 square feet, the unheated space has a 10-foot ceiling, a mahogany floor, and tall screened openings that line the room. For the couple and their now-teenage kids, the airy retreat has proven to be a favorite spot in which to kick back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of their renovation. ■

**For more information about expanding and redesigning a home**  
Go to [www.thisoldhouse.com](http://www.thisoldhouse.com) or America Online keyword: This Old House and select "Remodeling and Adding On" in the Know-how section.

**LEFT:** The original patio-side facade was virtually windowless.  
**BELOW:** An oval window, a bay of twelve-over-one double-hungs, and the tall openings of the screened-in porch (interior view shown at right) bring more light, air, and views into the house.

