

This Old House

JULY/AUGUST 2008

THIS PAGE: At the center of the new home is an ell detached from the 1834 farmhouse next door. Moved in the 1940s and expanded in the 1950s, the structure had fallen into disrepair.

OPPOSITE: Clerestory windows flood the double-height kitchen with light. New oak beams act as structural cross-ties, a heftier version of the original exposed timber in the living room. The island top is salvaged chestnut.



SECOND LIFE

The 1830s farmhouse with 1950s additions was a shoo-in for a teardown.

Then a pair of old-house buffs decided to revive its antique core and build a gracious, vintage-look home around it

- BY JILL CONNORS
- PHOTOGRAPHS BY JÜRGEN FRANK
- PRODUCED BY COLETTE SCANLON
- STYLING BY INGRID LEES



EVERY HOUSE HAS A STORY.

In the case of one northern Westchester County, New York, home, the tale is one piece fact and another part fiction, complete with a World War II-era amputation, a tangle of slithering house guests, and an almost-cloverleaf-shaped swimming pool.

First, the facts: Once upon a time, back in the late 1940s, the one-and-a-half-story summer kitchen arm of an 1834 farmhouse was sawed off and moved to a scenic spot a few hundred yards away. That post-and-beam piece of the building—a cooking/dining/living room with a sleeping loft—grew into a rambling house in the 1950s, when two one-story additions were built. By the time the current owners bought it a few years ago, the three-bedroom was a dilapidated hodgepodge: “The roof leaked, there were snakes in the basement, and you had to go down a hatch to reach the laundry,” says Rick O’Leary, one of the designers charged with taking the house from ruin to revival.

The place had its virtues. It was, according to the homeowners, on a “magnificent” piece of land: five acres that offered sweeping views of farmland and rolling hills. On it, the previous owners had put in an endearingly odd pool: a shamrock shape that had been improvised after bedrock hindered digging. And despite neighbors buzzing that any newcomer would surely knock the place down to build a McMansion, the buyers found a lot to like about the house. They were sold on its modest scale; it meant that almost every room had good light and views. They also loved the exposed beams and chestnut floors in the home’s 19th-century core. It felt like a classically built country house—exactly what they had hunted for.

Set on preserving all that was salvageable about the house, the couple decided to renovate—but only after revising its history. At a planning meeting, they handed designer Rick O’Leary and his partner and wife, Liz, a fictional story line for the place: It would look like an antique house that had been lovingly “modernized” in the 1920s and meticulously maintained ever since. They even had a name for it, Sunset Valley Farm, borrowed from a sign found at an antiques show.

The real house, of course, was a real wreck: No insulation and antiquated plumbing and heating systems meant the job wouldn’t fall

ABOVE: Three dormers with six-over-six windows now top the home’s original core, though the roof was raised to fit them in.

RIGHT: The windowed dressing area outside the master bedroom is lined with built-in storage, such as top-to-bottom clothes closets and a bureau.

OPPOSITE: An original timber beam and the old firebox tie the living room to its 1834 beginnings. The rest of the home’s antique center was rebuilt from the floor deck up.





FLOOR PLANS

Downstairs, an entry, laundry, and half bath occupy the 150 square feet added to the footprint. The rest of the extra space was gained upstairs, by bumping up the new kitchen's ceiling to 12 feet, raising the roof above the original portion of the home, and adding the master suite.



PRO ADVICE



“Don’t build bigger than you need. Better to stay small and spend any extra on the details.”

— RICK O’LEARY, DESIGNER

far from a gut-and-rebuild. But the project would preserve original details and promote the notion of Yankee thrift: Who needs a new one when we can fix the one we’ve got?

The O’Leary duo, working with architect Kevin Quinlan, created a 3,000-square-foot floor plan that addressed the house’s shortcomings: no proper entryway, a cramped kitchen, a bathroom shortage, and a first-floor master bedroom with little privacy. The reconfiguration would give the owners the big kitchen they really wanted, a home office that would double as a guest room, and a laundry, powder room, and mudroom on the first floor, plus an upstairs master suite—all while staying close to the house’s original footprint. The design called for adding 150 square feet to the foundation but otherwise building up to make space. “We got lots of square footage inside without overpowering the old scale,” says Quinlan.

On the exterior, detailing would take cues from the “parent” home, still standing next door, and from traditional New England farmhouse style. These features would include cedar clapboards and shingles, and window trim mimicking elements from the original 1834 exterior. But when it came to the interior, Rick and Liz O’Leary pictured a different house. To establish the feel of a 1920s upgrade, they designed every room and passageway with details indicative of the period, from fixed shelving and glass-front cabinets to refined fixtures and retro tilework.

Work began in the living room, the antique core of the new home. The house was stripped to the floor deck and all the walls were reframed and insulated, but in this room, with an original fireplace, contractors Gordon Moesch and Tim Lippert retained or repurposed what they could. This included, Moesch says, “the basic timber structure, the floor structure, the firebox, and an exposed beam.” The ceiling, raised 2 inches from the original beam height, is old-house authentic at 7 feet. After discovering that the chestnut floorboards had

ABOVE: Built-in glass-front china cabinets and arched pocket doors create the illusion of a 1920s redo in the dining room. The doors conveniently close off the adjacent kitchen when company comes.

RIGHT: French doors along the kitchen’s west-facing wall provide access to a stone patio and a walkway that leads to the swimming pool, which is perfectly sited for sunset views.

OPPOSITE: The laundry room’s open shelves, curved brackets, painted wainscoting, and soapstone counter give it a time-honored look.





been supplemented with a lesser-grade wood, they removed the chestnut and set it aside. After the room was pared down to its bones, the designers finished it in 19th-century-farmhouse style, using wide pine floorboards, flat baseboards, and six-over-six windows with 1x4 casings with a beaded edge. Says O'Leary, "This was the model for the rest of the house."

The adjoining dining room sat in a newer wing, and in it the design team saw a chance to work in 1920s hallmarks like built-in china cupboards, which frame a paneled pocket door.

Having relegated the master suite to the new upstairs, the O'Learys set about turning the first-floor one-story former bedroom wing into an expansive new kitchen, bumping up the room's roof to double height for a soaring ceiling. Architecturally, this room is the finished house's most modern, but its surfaces evoke both of the house's period styles. The vaulted ceiling is lined with tongue-and-groove boards resembling 19th-century planks; the center island is topped with the old chestnut boards salvaged from the living room floor. Early-20th-century finishes include flat-panel cabinet doors and bin-pull hardware.

The old kitchen, in the other 1950s one-story addition, offered a practical spot for a combined home office and guest bedroom, with the new first-floor powder room located next door. Bumping up to add another floor on top of it, the O'Learys made way for the master bedroom and bath. The owners, one of whom works in New York City's residential real estate market and has scouted many a magnificent pre-World War II apartment building, had particular ideas for finishing the master bath. The 1920s-style flourishes they carried to their country house include a Carrara marble countertop and a basket-weave marble tile floor.

Reaction from neighbors has assured the owners and their design team that the renovation met another of their overall goals as well: for the home to fit with the neighborhood just as it always had. "At an open house after the project was finished, I heard one guest say, 'This is the best example of 'downsizing I've ever seen,'" says Rick O'Leary. Though the home had grown by about 500 square feet, it felt cozier than ever. It was the perfect compliment—both to the owners' vision and the top-to-bottom redo that took their ideas to heart. ■



ABOVE: An east-facing arched window in the master bedroom invites in morning sun. The wood for the decorative rafters was reclaimed from other sections of the house.

RIGHT: The homeowners chose a classic black-and-white scheme for the master bath, with a vanity top and backsplash of Carrara marble, subway-tile walls, and basket-weave-tiled floor. Chrome sconces and nickel faucetry complete the look.

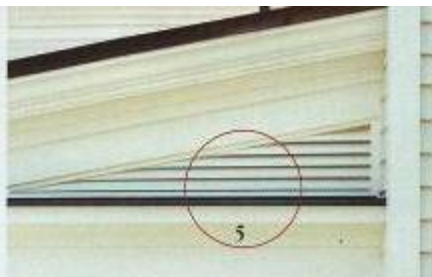


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MAKING NEW LOOK OLD

The homeowners, designers, and architect made mostly new construction look as if it had been there for nearly a century. Here's how



ON THE OUTSIDE:

1. WENT WITH WOOD SIDING and all-wood windows and doors, staying authentic by sticking with the material that was used to build the original home in the 19th century.

2. ADDED TRADITIONAL COPPER on the secondary roof. These sections, which have a lower pitch and get hit with runoff from above, would weather faster in wood. "The metal will last 50 years or more without maintenance," says designer Rick O'Leary.

3. DETAILED THE EAVES with an assembly of stock molding to create an elegant transition. "We improvised a bit to keep costs down, but the cornice treatment tries hard to echo detailing found on historic New England farmhouses," says O'Leary.

4. GAVE THE NEW ENTRY the look of a porch that was enclosed long ago. Archways clip the window casings. The posts are decorative pilasters made out of trim.

5. CONCEALED VENTS to avoid telltale modern touches. The range hood and dryer vents are hidden behind louvered boards tucked under the eaves. The metal flue from the master bedroom's gas fireplace is boxed out with plywood, faced with brick, and topped with a chimney cap set on masonry legs, to match the others on the house.

ON THE INSIDE:

6. VARIED WAINSCOTING STYLES on the walls in order to avoid modern-looking expanses of drywall and to suggest that the home has evolved rather than been "done." Similarly, different molding treatments hint at old-time frugality: More formal styles were put to use in the public spaces on the first floor, simpler ones in the private sleeping quarters upstairs.

7. WENT FOR BROKE ON BUILT-INS in nearly every room. These include open shelving, custom cabinets, and clever niches. One master bedroom wall is lined with bookshelves, built-in drawers, and a concealed trapdoor to a laundry chute.





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Transform your **entry, kitchen, and bath** with budget-conscious improvements that'll boost your home's wow factor—and its value



DIY

Projects





That PAY




Learn
how it's
done

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION. Sure, it's the key to success in life, but during uncertain financial times it's also fundamental to a winning renovation. That means putting your bucks—and your hard-earned off-hours—into fix-up projects that enhance your house without sucking every red cent out of your bank account. Like boosting your home's curb appeal by capping a concrete stoop with stone, changing the front door, and adding new hardware and paint. Or giving your kitchen a serious sprucing with inexpensive soapstone counters and a beyond-basic backsplash. Or even reviving the bath with only a handsome vanity redo.

We've got before-and-after proof that a relatively modest investment can yield big-time dividends in how your place looks and feels—just the kind of upgrade that helps your home hold its value. At *This Old House*, we like to take the long view. But there's no denying the short-term satisfaction of completing the projects that are shown on the following pages and worked out in step-by-step detail at thisoldhouse.com.

by **Natalie Rodriguez & Sal Vaglica**

1 Lighting

Exterior lights illuminate house numbers and focus the eye on the entry. At night, the hanging fixture shown here makes the portico glow from within. When deciding on your light, pick a style that complements your home's architecture.

A: This brass base and opal glass shade impart a formal look. \$157, troy-lighting.com

B: The bronze finish on this rustic lantern is fitting for a more casual entry. \$215, kichler.com

C: Burnished bronze banding lends a contemporary air to this flush-mount. \$169, feiss.com



A



B



C



A

B

C

2 Door

Consider the front door as an introduction to your home. Here, the homeowner traded a dowdy brown-painted door for a mahogany one with a clear finish. Divided-light windows offer outside views and fill the foyer with sunlight. By using an install-ready prehung door, you can make this upgrade in a day. Choose from dozens of designs and three durable materials.

A: This fir door with a scrolling metal grill is a traditional pick but needs refinishing over time. \$1,325, simpsondoor.com

B: Raised paneling on this thrifty steel door adds style, but the surface gets hot in direct sun. \$204, masonite.com

C: A leaded glass insert gives this fiberglass door a custom look. Long-lasting and maintenance-free, fiberglass can be pricey. \$4,500, jeld-wen.com



3 Paint

Brush on a fresh coat of paint to make your entry pop. Here, a pale yellow accented with bright white trim replaced a drab putty-and-cream palette. Other standout schemes: green hues, which help a home blend with the landscape and perfectly complement a lively red door. Shades of blue pair well with earth tones, such as a sandy beige and terra-cotta. Just be sure to pick saturated colors if your house gets direct sun, as pastels will look washed out.

4 Steps and Walkway

Turn a dull concrete stoop into a showpiece by capping the treads and risers with stone. Here, the same New York bluestone used for the treads is echoed in the new mortared front walkway, creating a seamless transition between stoop and path. The risers are clad in gray natural granite veneers. Other DIY capping options include clay Saltillo, split-brick, and limestone pavers.



ILLUSTRATION: LARRY BATES

5 Planters

Large potted plants visually anchor an entry and provide a burst of color. Just make sure the containers you put them in are weatherproof, like the lattice-patterned concrete ones used at left. **A:** This lightweight, molded-fiberglass box is a replica of

a lead antique. \$275, charlestongardens.com **B:** Steel arches cradle this copper vessel. \$199, smithandhawken.com **C:** Richly colored ceramic can brighten up a home's monochromatic paint scheme. \$38, pier1.com



A

B

C



Hanging light: Kichler

Mahogany door: Simpson Door Co.

Brass door hardware and bronze house number: Baldwin

Exterior paint: Aura by Benjamin Moore

Kitchen-Counter Swap

Renovating a kitchen is like cooking a gourmet meal. Take on too much, and the work can mushroom out of control, busting your budget and your patience. While we can't choose your recipes, we can help focus your renovation on the elements that give the most bang for your buck: the countertop and backsplash. Here, near-black soapstone replaced dingy white laminate. Because it cuts and shapes with woodworking tools, the only cost was for the stone—\$24 a square foot from M. Teixeira Soapstone, which also sells a DIY tool kit at soapstones.com. For the backsplash, the homeowner chose easy-to-clean solid surfacing milled like beadboard. One 3X8 sheet cost \$556 and went up with a jigsaw and construction adhesive. Completing the makeover are a new stainless-steel undermount sink and pull-down faucet. More DIY countertops and backsplashes, and the fixtures that complement them, on these pages.



Counter: M. Teixeira Soapstone
Backsplash: Swanstone
Faucet: Grohe
Sink: Elkay



Before

Faucets

Inspired by commercial kitchen faucets, pull-down residential models can't be beat for function. And thanks to ergonomic controls like thumb-touch sprayers and a range of designs and finishes, they're also tops for comfort and style.

A: This arched gooseneck in Tuscan bronze has three spray functions and traditional styling. \$230,

pricepifter.com

B: The 22-inch-high arch and commercial look of this chrome faucet suit a modern kitchen. \$276, danze.com

C: The 59-inch pullout hose on this minimalist faucet eliminates the need for a dedicated pot filler. \$340, mycucina.com



Learn how to do it online:



Install this soapstone counter in six simple steps. Follow along at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts



Hang a solid-surface backsplash, using the tools you've got in the garage, at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts



1 Countertop

Even more manageable than this soapstone slab are 12-by-12-inch stone squares, which lay out in a grid just like ceramic tiles. Use unsanded grout for tighter joints and a smoother surface that better approximates the look of seamless stone.

A: Granite tile looks high-end if you finish the edges with a 1½-inch bullnose. And compared with about \$90 a square foot for an installed slab, it's also a bargain. About \$25 per square, benissimosystems.com

B: Unlike most natural stone tiles, this sandy-hued engineered version never has to be sealed. \$12.60 per square foot, e-counters.com

C: Slate's dramatic veining rivals marble, and because it's less porous, it's stain and bacteria resistant. Starting at \$6.50 per square foot, pebblez.com

2 Backsplash

In contrast to the high-tech solid surface used here, other stylish and DIY-friendly backsplashes are made from age-old materials: glass, metal, and porcelain.

A: A backing on these light-reflecting glass subway tiles prevents trowel marks from showing through. \$21.50 per square foot, artistic tile.com

B: The 6-inch repeating pattern on this clear-finished metal ceiling tile makes it ideal for a backsplash, hiding cuts along the grid seams. \$12 and up per 24-inch square panel, americantinceiling.com

C: Mesh backing on these porcelain mosaics makes installation a snap. Beige bricks: \$21 per square foot, homedepot.com. Mint penny rounds: \$8 per square foot, auc-tile.com



4 Sinks

It's easy to keep this new soapstone counter tidy. Just sweep crumbs and spills into an undermount sink, rather than worry about gunk collecting around a drop-in's lip. Some of the most durable undermounts are made from stainless steel and copper. For steel, the lower its gauge, the thicker

the basin's walls. So pick 20-gauge or lower to ensure that it won't dent. For copper, hand-hammering is a telltale sign of too quality.

A: This stainless sink's removable drying shelf frees up counter space that would otherwise be occupied by a dish rack. \$825, elkayusa.com

B: Two stainless-steel bowls let you wash in one and rinse in the other. \$340, frankeusa.com

C: This handmade copper sink offers a rugged texture and a finish that will darken over time, but you pay for it. \$2,725, nativetrails.net



1 Lights

A new fixture brightens your bath in more ways than one, providing crucial task lighting for grooming and enhancing the look of the room. Choose overheads or sconces that cast evenly diffused light to prevent glare.

A: Sconces like this aluminum Art Deco-style one should be spaced 36 to 40 inches apart to avoid casting shadows on your face. \$259. schoolhouseelectric.com

B: This double-lamp fixture has etched, tea-stained glass shades and metalwork recalling ornate wrought iron. \$165. thomaslighting.com

C: This colorful Craftsman-style light can be mounted alone over a medicine cabinet or used in a pair to flank the sides. \$212. wilmettelighting.com



3 Faucets

The faucet is the jewel of your setup. Here, chrome cross-handled taps complement the vintage look of the furniturelike vanity. Be sure the one you pick is sized for the predrilled holes in the counter or sink you plan to use. Choose among single-hole spouts with built-in controls and three-hole ones with a 4- or 8-inch spread between taps.

A: The boxy lines of this pewter faucet make it ideal for bungalow baths. \$321. deltafaucet.com

B: A brushed-nickel finish and shapely handles give this faucet a classic look. \$240. moen.com

C: Fill tall vessels with this bamboo-look spout in distressed bronze. \$355. danze.com



2 Medicine Cabinets

From contemporary to classic, mirrored cabinets provide a place to primp and space to stow toiletries. Here, the homeowner also saved valuable square footage by swapping a wall-mount cabinet for a new semirecessed one with a white-painted frame.

A: This stainless-steel-wrapped cabinet mounts between the studs for a face flush with the wall. \$495. restorationhardware.com

B: Elegant crown molding tops this simple wall-mount cabinet with three adjustable shelves hidden inside. \$730. robem.com

C: If space is at a premium and you can't open the wall to recess a cabinet, hang a slim mirror instead. A 3½-inch-deep shelf on this wood-framed model provides just enough room for a toothbrush and paste. \$149. potterybarn.com

4 Vanities

Nothing defines the look of a bath more than its vanity. Rather than a closed cabinet, this homeowner chose open shelving, helping to make the 100-square-foot room appear larger. Standard vanity depth is 21 inches, but lengths range to suit a wide variety of bathroom sizes.

A: The white-painted finish on this simple wood vanity reflects light, making a diminutive bath

seem brighter and roomier. \$429. expo.com

B: This contemporary vanity with a granite vessel sink attaches to the wall, leaving the floor free for a waste bin. \$650. xylem.biz

C: No need for a counter with this integral porcelain sink supported by a stained-wood base. Open storage and a built-in rack hold towels. \$848. expo.com



Overhead light:
Lowe's
Counter and sink:
Pegasus
Medicine cabinet,
vanity and faucet:
Expo Design
Center

SECOND LIFE (pp. 96–103)



Architect: Kevin Quinlan, Kevin Quinlan Architecture LLC, Wilton, CT; 203-210-5050; kevin-quinlan-architect.com.

Designers: Liz & Rick O'Leary, Croton Falls, NY; 914-669-0014.

Contractors: Basic Concepts, Hopewell Junction, NY; 845-223-6951

Cabinetmaker: Jeff Luchon, Luchon Cabinet & Woodworks LLC, Stafford Springs, CT; 860-684-5037; luchoncabinet.com.

Refrigerator: Sub-Zero Inc., Madison, WI; 800-222-7820; subzero.com.

Range and hood: Viking, Greenwood, MS; 888-845-4641; vikingrange.com.

Dishwashers: Bosch Home Appliances, Huntington Beach, CA; 800-921-9622; boschappliances.com.

Microwave: GE, Louisville, KY; 800-626-2005; ge.com.

Kitchen sink: Waterworks, Danbury, CT; 800-899-6757; waterworks.com.

Kitchen faucet: Perrin & Rowe, a division of Rohl LLC.

Island sink: Elkay Manufacturing Company, Oak Brook, IL; 630-572-3192; elkayusa.com.

Island faucet: Rohl LLC, Irvine, CA; 800-777-9762; rohlhome.com.

Hanging light fixtures: Rejuvenation, Portland, OR; 888-401-1900; rejuvenation.com.

TV: Vizio, Irvine, CA; 888-849-4623; vizio.com.

Dining chairs: Ethan Allen, Danbury, CT; 203-743-8500; ethanallen.com.

Area rugs: Dash & Albert Rug Company, Pittsfield, MA; 800-557-2035;

dashandalbert.com. **Bath fixtures:** Rohl LLC.

Pedestal sink and shower rainhead: Waterworks.

Toilet: Kohler, Kohler, WI; 800-456-4537; kohler.com.

Subway tile: American Standard, Piscataway, NJ; 800-442-1902; americanstandard-us.com.

Bed: Bob's Furniture; mybobs.com.

Armoire: Antique.

Chests and lamps: Property of homeowners.

Bedding: Ralph Lauren; ralphlauren.com.

Paint: Benjamin Moore & Co., Montvale, NJ; benjaminmoore.com.

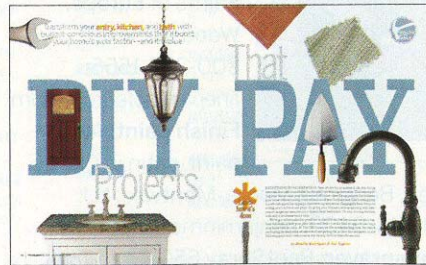
DIY PROJECTS THAT PAY (pp. 112–119)

Front Entry Fix-Up: **Light:** Senna Outdoor Pendant, Kichler Lighting, Cleveland, OH; 866-558-5706; kichler.com.

Door: Proctor 7860 in mahogany, Simpson Door Company, McCleary, WA; 800-952-4057; simpsondoor.com.

Door hardware: Lexington Mortise Trim, Baldwin, Reading, PA; 800-566-1986; baldwinhardware.com.

House number: Craftsman Baldwin



Archetype, Baldwin.

Paint: Aura exterior flat latex in White Rock #918 and trim in Simply White OC-117 exterior semigloss latex, Benjamin Moore & Co., Montvale, NJ; benjaminmoore.com.

Stone: Sammarco Stone & Supply Inc., New Rochelle, NY; 914-636-6563; sammarcostone.com.

Kitchen-Counter Swap: **Soapstone counter:** Julia Soapstone, M. Teixeira Soapstone, Hackensack, NJ; 877-478-8170; soapstones.com.

Backsplash: Swanstone Classics Decorative Wall Panel in White Beadboard, The Swan Corporation, St. Louis, MO; 800-325-7008; theswancorp.com.

Sink: Gourmet Lustertone Undermount Sink model ELU2816, Elkay, Oak Brook, IL; 630-572-3192; elkayusa.com.

Faucet: LadyLux Café 33 755 KDO Stainless Steel/Black, Grohe, Bloomingdale, IL; 630-582-7711; groheamerica.com.

Curtains and tea kettle: Gracious Home, New York, NY; 800-338-7809; gracioushome.com.

Knives: Wüsthof-Trident of America Inc., Briarcliff Manor, NY; 914-923-6000; wusthof.com.

Bath-Vanity Revamp: **Light:** Lowe's; 800-445-6937; lowes.com. **Countertop and sink:** Pegasus; pegasusinfo.com. Available through Home Depot; homedepot.com.

Medicine cabinet, vanity base, and faucet: Expo Design Center; 800-553-3199; expo.com.