



fresh start

A blended family transforms an Ardmore Colonial to fit their new life. *By Tara Behan*

Lately, a particular sort of client has been keeping Jeffrey Spoelker in demand: the motivated move-up buyer. “I describe it as the next level of home ownership,” says the principal of Ardmore-based JMS Architecture. “The clients understand the beauty of the construction and layout of a current house, but they’re willing to make changes to bring it up to their standards and lifestyle. I collaborate with them and come up with some creative ideas on how to reuse the space.”

Such was the case with a pair of buyers who had four children between them from previous marriages. Two of the kids were grown and wouldn’t be living in the house full time; the other two were in

elementary school. “Although my husband’s children weren’t living with us, we were looking for a house where everyone could feel at home,” says the owner. “We wanted everyone to have a bedroom, not a guestroom that they would share.”

With the superior Lower Merion School District in mind, the couple narrowed the search to Ardmore and Penn Valley. Much to their surprise, a 116-year-old three-floor Colonial in Ardmore really stood out. “As I was walking through the house, I saw the possibilities,” says the owner. “I knew it felt right.”

The house fit their criteria: location, number of bedrooms, an outdoor living space. But it was far from move-in ready.

Everyday living

The main issue with the house was its compartmentalized layout. The rooms were closed off from each other. “They wanted to freshen it up and open it up for modern living,” says Spoelker.

That meant removing a wall separating the kitchen and the family room to create flow between the two areas. The owner referred to kitchens from her native Spain as inspiration. “When you go to the countryside, there’s a lot of very old construction,” she says. “People are renovating these farmhouses in a modern way that still has a rustic look. I always liked that.”

Wisely, she kept her selections neutral, which helps give the *continued on page 52*



NEW BEGINNINGS: (Clockwise from opposite page) The home's guestroom is actually acquired living space from the renovation of the third-floor attic; sliding barn doors provide decorative access to the master bedroom's walk-in closet; an outside living area almost feels like an extension of the kitchen; removing a wall allowed for a modern, open layout between the family room and the kitchen.



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kitchen an uncomplicated, fresh feel. The space is outfitted with white cabinetry, honed granite countertops, stainless-steel appliances, a white subway-tile backsplash, and oak floors.

The top of the kitchen's island is made from reclaimed Lancaster County chestnut, adding a natural layer of color to the mostly white space. "The island acts as a working table, so it doesn't have room for people to sit," the owner points out.

Seating for up to six is available at a distressed farmhouse table from Restoration Hardware. A new sliding glass door next to the table leads to the terrace.

An existing enclosed patio off the dining room lacked appeal, so the owner opted to open it up and make it into a covered eating area. It can be accessed through French doors in the dining room, as well as from the rear terrace. "It's the idea of trying to extend the square footage of the house without adding anything on," says Spoelker. "You gain square footage by using the outdoor space. In this part of the country, it's not as easy because of the weather. But during the summer, it's a great space to dine and relax."

The attic space is what actually sold the owners on the house. They envisioned two guest bedrooms, a bathroom and an office.

In the family room, furnishings are comfortable and practical, with a couch and side chairs from Restoration Hardware. Anticipating spills, the owner chose slipcovers made for outdoor use. Above the couch, a gallery displays works of art painted by the owner's mother, plus some pieces from her own personal collection. Vivid colors inspired by the paintings were used for the throw pillows.

Restful retreats

Pre-renovation, the home's second floor had five bedrooms—all of varying sizes—

and just one bathroom. To make the best use of the space, Spoelker recommended three en-suite bedrooms. Each of the two children has a bedroom that's a mirror image of the other, with a walk-in closet and desk area. "These are spaces that they can grow into," says Spoelker.

In the master bath, the same white cabinetry in the kitchen was used for the double-sink vanity, with a soft cream-colored marble on top. A pair of sliding barn doors on exposed rails marks the entrance to the master bedroom's walk-in closet.

Up on the third floor, the attic space is what actually sold the owners on the house. Here, they envisioned two guest bedrooms, a bathroom and an office—and Spoelker delivered on all of it.

Two dormers were added, flooding the space with light. A bed, flanked by bookshelves, is tucked under the eaves. "I call this floor the getaway floor," Spoelker says. "The main room I refer to as the sanctuary."

These days, the family couldn't feel more at home. "We learned that the decoration can turn people off more than the actual structure," the owner says. "We're so glad we made the investment." **MLT**

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