

before & after

a wink and a nod



ARCHITECTURAL LEGERDEMAIN TRANSFORMS A VIRGINIA HOUSE FROM ORDINARY TO OUTSTANDING.

BY CATHY ERICKSON

There's a wealth of history and heritage packed into the architecture of the quaint-looking cottage on Dittmar Road. The architect and homeowners could cite oodles of research—styles and schools of design, that sort of thing. The truth is, they just up made the style.

"It's far too whimsical to be considered historic preservation," says architect Rob Morris. "I like to think of it as 'historic fabrication' with a nod toward the past."

Heavy brackets and a gracefully arched eyebrow in the roofline put a familiar expression on the home's face. It's loosely based on styles set by the turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts Movement, says Morris.

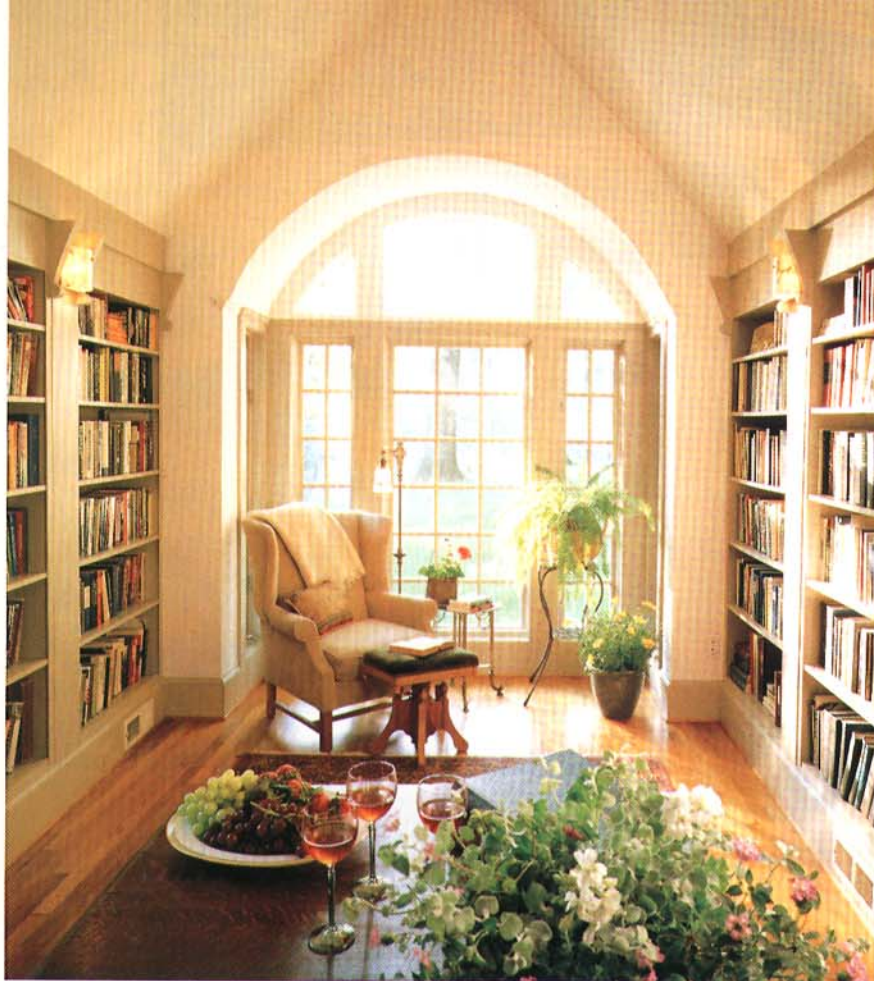
For years the house masqueraded as a Cape Cod, for lack of any better classification. It was never quite a Cape Cod, and now it's not quite Arts and Crafts. But for Sam and Suzanne Gardiner, it's altogether quite perfect. Now, that is.

But it wasn't even close to perfect before Morris got his architectural mitts on it. Suzanne bought the place in 1978, a boxy little bower nestled into a comfy corner of Arlington, Virginia. Two years later the attic was remodeled to add kids' bedrooms and baths.

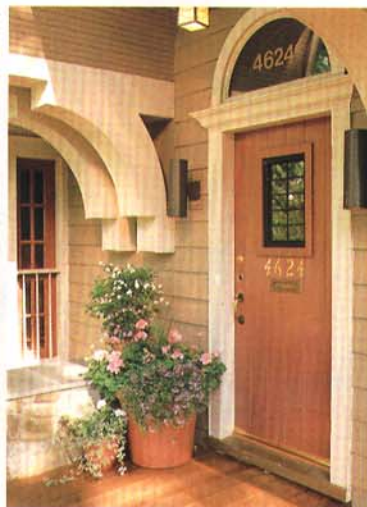
"The previous owners had honeymooned in Scotland," she reports, "and they wanted to replicate a cozy Scottish cottage." Aye, but wee small rooms that seem cozy on the Scottish moors can feel like

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Built in 1936 to echo simple Scottish cottages, this suburban Virginia house changed its nondescript facade with the addition of dramatic details. Dominant Craftsman-era touches—the extended roofline, arching eyebrow, and massive support brackets—reflect the home's latest and most successful renovation.



Left: The former den “would house no more than a small desk and chair,” Morris says. At 12x12 feet, “it had the sense of an elaborate walk-in closet with a chimney.” It now stretches 20 feet to a west window, and offers an inviting place to work or relax. **Below:** Like the back of Atlas, muscular brackets shoulder their burden admirably, upholding the broad roof. The effect is one of sturdy, comforting shelter. **Bottom:** New windows and French doors help extend the interior’s reach by opening up rooms to the world outside.



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shipping crates in Virginia. And a floor plan that worked for raising children isn't a comfortable fit for a busy pair of work-at-home adults.

In fact, it was careers and kids that led the Gardiners to conclude they could no longer squeak by in their cracker-box cottage. Both enjoy regular visits from grown children with kids of their own. Both work at home at least part of the time. And both enjoy a busy entertaining schedule. But neither enjoyed the dark, cramped rooms, wheezy heating, and tuckered-out plumbing of their aging home.

“Just think ‘camping,’” Suzanne says with a laugh as she describes the foibles of her pre-remodeled house. Those long-ago honeymooners and their Scottish cottage made a sweet story, but it was time to add a new chapter.

Suzanne and Sam made a hit list of the home's faults: small windows that pinched sunlight, a kitchen so small it had only one electrical outlet, meager storage, and a stern Scotch facade that welcomed no one and even poured water onto the heads of visitors who dared come to the front door during a rainstorm.

All of that they endured. But one overriding wish finally prodded them into action. “It was actually the desire for a porch that led to all this,” Suzanne says. “This is a very pedestrian neighborhood, so we wanted a front porch where our neighbors and friends could stop, visit, and chat.” Preferably without getting drenched at the door.

Rob Morris listened to what the Gardiners wanted. He thought about his own tastes. Then he followed yet another viewpoint, one most homeowners never consider. “It was



what the house wanted,” he says seriously. According to Morris, good remodeling can take direction from the home itself—from its past, its setting, and the needs it serves.

Such thinking may raise eyebrows. It certainly raised one in the roofline Morris proposed to extend over the Gardiners' entry to steer runoff away from visitors. And that eyebrow idea would lead Morris to the massive brackets that extend the roof's strong character.

Suzanne knew they were on the right track. “We wanted to respect the tradition of the house,” she says, “to retain the

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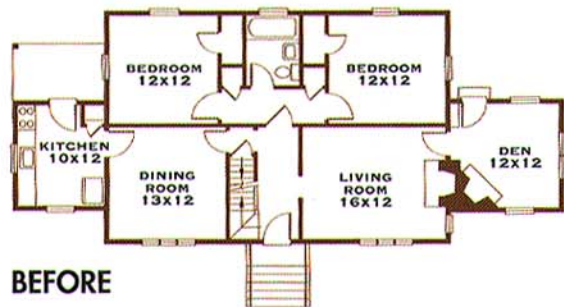


Left: The round dining room's grid ceiling "is another nod to the past," says architect Rob Morris. "Using drywall, we were able to take some very basic interior details and make them rich and powerful, achieving the shade, the shadow of millwork without spending the four dollars a linear foot." **Below:** With married kids and grandchildren who visit, the Gardiners wanted an island kitchen where the family could gather. This kitchen stretches into an ample family area and adjacent breakfast room. Its predecessor, "about eight by ten feet," Suzanne says, "was barely functional." Such welcome transformations are renovation's rewards.

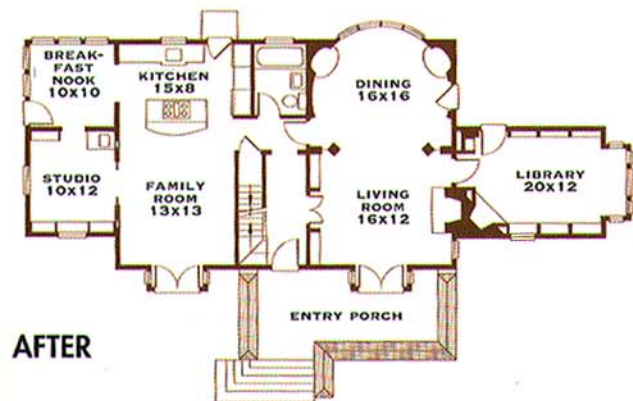
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image of an old house—we were adamant about that."

The new, older-looking facade calls attention to the roof, the consummate symbol of shelter. That focus is reinforced by the roof's massive support brackets, which recall the emphasis on structure evident in homes from the Arts and Crafts era. "The eyebrow was a whimsical idea to provide a sleepy, kind of romantic touch," says Morris.

Inside, the former floor plan opened up to a whole new layout. "The function of the house had changed dramatically," Morris says, "and the spaces no longer worked for them."



BEFORE



AFTER

The first floor's two bedrooms were sacrificed to create a kitchen and family room on one side of the house, and a living room and dramatic round dining room on the other. An old cubbyhole den was stretched 8 feet to make a workable library for Sam. And the former too-small kitchen became a just-right studio for Suzanne's painting. Finally, a sleepy old porch awakened as a bright breakfast room.

Even on days when both Gardiners are working at home, they're out of each other's way. Sam can work with clients in the library, and even use the living room as a lobby. Suzanne still has the privacy of her studio wing and the comforts of the kitchen and family room. "It works beautifully," she says.

That's the secret of efficiency, the architect says: "We didn't add many square feet but redefined the spaces, primarily through the use of details."

Renovating their cottage was "one of the most creative, exciting things we've ever done," Suzanne says. "We felt totally involved. Even if we emptied it, the house wouldn't feel plain. It always offers a sense of surprise and gives us comfort and pleasure." □

Architect: Rob Morris
Regional Editor: Eileen Deymier

For more information, see the **Buying Guide** on page 118.

