



MAKING IT COUNT

An architect finds untapped potential, to the tune of 1,550 square feet, for a family in Cambridge.

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As their son and daughter hit middle school, the owners of this Cambridge home found that their family needed a bit more elbow room. Realizing that they weren't making the best use of their home's 1,750 square feet, and wondering if there was untapped potential, they asked their friend, architect Tom Murdough, to take a look.

Murdough and builder Kevin Cradock ended up converting about 1,550 square feet of living space within the home's existing footprint, and adding 342 square feet to the back of the house. The team dug out and finished the basement, raised the roof and refinished the attic, and rebuilt the back addition, pushing it 5 feet into the backyard and 3 feet into the side yard. "It was a space-planning, problem-solving, gut renovation with tons of zoning, historical, and COVID restrictions," the architect says.

The couple turned to Abbey Flores to pull together warm, layered interiors. The rooms incorporate many of the homeowner's existing pieces and ideas. "They were really willing to go for it," Flores says of the clients' enthusiasm for bold color



Chunky knit valances, a rug with a Greek key design based on a Miles Davis album cover, and pillows made from upholstery salvaged from the couple's old sofas enhance the living room ensemble.



Above left: Handmade ceramic pendants with a crackle glaze and oak stools with brass footrails, both by Devol, lend warmth and age to the new kitchen, which has a large lift-and-slide door that connects it seamlessly to the patio. Above right: The homeowners described their prior kitchen as a dark container that jutted into the yard.

and eclectic pairings. “Usually you’re going in the other direction, saying to clients, ‘Trust me, it will work.’”

The living room best illustrates the owners’ fearless approach. Flores started by identifying nontraditional fabrics to reupholster the traditional sofa from the wife’s childhood. The winner was a hot pink ikat. For the chairs? An embroidered Mexican textile in chartreuse. “If you put those two fabrics next to each other, it’s not an obvious match,” Flores says. “We kept layering other things in until it worked.” She notes that varying the scale of patterns so they don’t compete is crucial.

The dining room, located on the other side of a column with built-in bookshelves and a bar, is much sparer. Color comes from the artwork, which includes a piece by Alexander Calder that was gifted to the husband’s grandparents by the artist himself. The simple furniture — spindle chairs, and a table made from wood reclaimed by New York Heartwoods from storm-downed trees — leaves the room feeling airy. “The openness of this room balances the excitement in the living room,” Flores says.

The kitchen, with cabinetry painted Benjamin Moore Hollingsworth Green, occupies the ground level of the expanded addition that the team rebuilt at the back of the house. “We took just a little space from the yard,” Murdough says. “There’s a generous cooking space, large win-

dows, and a lift-and-slide door; it’s a dramatic improvement.” The homeowners love the morning light and easy access to the reclaimed brick patio that landscape designer Jean Brooks painstakingly pieced back together.

The stairs, however, were the most challenging part of the project. Cradock, who the homeowners praise as a meticulous craftsman, led the reconstruction. “We brought all the stairs into a stacked three-flight assembly, which was quite a feat,” he says. Prior to renovating, the winding stair to the basement and the steep stair to the attic were barely functional and behind closed doors. Now, the stairway is a prominent architectural feature that threads the house together.

Murdough relocated the second-floor bath, slotting it between the two kids’ bedrooms, to create a corridor to the primary bedroom. Before, the couple had to pass through the bathroom to get to their bedroom; hardly ideal when you have teenagers. He also enclosed the den at the top of the stairs to make it more private.

The couple’s bedroom is still above the kitchen, but now it’s larger, with more closet space

and an en suite bath. The bedroom’s lavender grass-cloth wallcovering is sophisticated and soothing, but stands up in a house full of color. Flores had the couple’s caned bed painted black to work with their black and gold vintage dresser, then added a modern, gold Sputnik pendant at the top of the room.

Light spills down the new staircase to the attic thanks to the wide shed dormers that Murdough added to each side of the house. The architectural tweak also turned the cramped space into an office and favorite escape. The kids sometimes spend the night with a friend on the built-in daybed, which is strewn with pillows made from fabrics repurposed from their grandparents’

drapes and reclaimed from their other grandparents’ attic.

One might say that the pillows are the cherries on top of a house in which almost every detail has meaning. Flores sums it up, saying, “When you work with people who are passionate and like unique things, the result is a home that really represents them.” ■

Send comments to magazine@globe.com.

RESOURCES

Architect: Murdough Design, murdoughdesign.com

Contractor: Kevin Cradock Builders, cradockbuilders.com

Interior Designer: Abbey Flores Design, afloresdesign.com

Landscape Designer: Jean Brooks Landscapes, jeanbrookslandscapes.com



The shelf under the Calder artwork holds Ewe dolls from Togo, West Africa, that the wife purchased at Nomad in Cambridge.

Below left: Architect Tom Murdough designed a spartan-style stair rail that’s in keeping with the spirit of the old house. Below right: The cockatoo lamp on the dresser, a gift from the wife’s aunt, adds a note of levity to the primary bedroom.



BEFORE PHOTOGRAPH FROM MURDOUGH DESIGN