

TRADITIONAL HOME

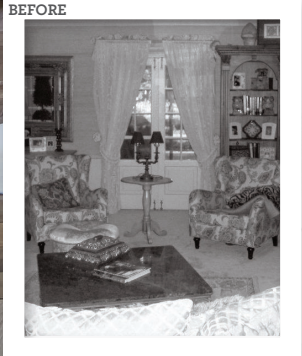
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Captivating
designs FOR
A BACKYARD
ESCAPE p44

the
BEFORE & AFTER
Issue

Big
ideas
FOR A SMALL
KITCHEN
p112

45+ ways
to **revamp**
your
rooms



true romance

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A BEGUILING 1920s HOME PROVES
THE POWER OF LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT



Living room To make the 8-foot ceilings seem higher, designer Summer Thornton saturated the walls and ceiling in the same light hue and added vertical paneling to raise the eye. Art Deco references—in the vintage desk seen here and in the cabinet on the preceding pages—are sprinkled throughout the house. **Preceding pages** Leaded glass windows and a Circa pendant light become focal points in the otherwise neutral, pared-back foyer.



BEFORE





By all accounts it's a house that people are drawn to—a storybook charmer with a French Tudor-style exterior and a welcoming facade that turns heads. "I grew up in Bloomington and remember this house," says Chicago-based designer Summer Thornton. "We'd go out of our way to drive by. It feels like it's straight out of *Snow White*. It's so romantic."

Thornton's friend and client Neil Heller agrees. Having renovated multiple houses in the area, he'd had his eye on the bewitching home for years. "It's such a pretty place," Neil says. "I remember saying as a child that someday I was going to live here."

Happily, fate intervened when the owners stopped by a house that Neil was renovating down the street and mentioned that the fairy-tale abode would soon be on the market. What Neil didn't know at the time was that soon *he* wouldn't be. Call it kismet, or destiny, or just old-fashioned good luck—but soon after he bought the house, Neil met the previous owners' daughter, Jen, the two fell head-over-heels for each other, and they married.

Living room "Summer helped us keep the charm and coziness that this house has always had, but she's given it a new, modern life," homeowner Neil Heller says. Carpet was replaced with reclaimed oak floors, laid in a herringbone pattern, that add texture and interest to the neutral palette.







Dining room Walls are papered in a mink-hued grass cloth from Phillip Jeffries. "It's about contrasting the rest of the first floor with a shot of drama," Thornton says. The dining table was custom-made in a tone that matches the herringbone floor to give it an organic, natural feel.

Exterior and homeowners Neil Heller had already bought the 1920s home when he met Jen, who had grown up in the house. They now share the home as husband and wife.



BEFORE





Kitchen Steel-frame doors add a “sharpness and masculinity to the space,” Thornton says. “It’s a great contrast between this old, romantic house and its new, young owners.” The kitchen sitting area was formerly a sunporch.



And while they’re now happily ensconced in the home, its interiors are dramatically different from those Jen grew up in. A bachelor when he started the renovation process, Neil gave Thornton clear directives: He wanted to turn the 1929 house into a more modern version of itself, and he wanted a masculine palette mixed with interesting textures and a deconstructed feel. And very little color.

“Neil has a very defined aesthetic,” the designer acknowledges. “The challenge was to marry his desire for a masculine look with the romance of this house.” The solution? Incorporating texture and a mix of materials that enliven the neutral palette and exude character. “Our guiding word for this project was ‘honest,’” Thornton notes. “We strived to use materials that were honest, artisanal, and handmade.”

In the process, they reintroduced the sense of history and character that had been stripped from the house over the years. Herringbone floors in 100-year-old reclaimed, unfinished oak were installed throughout the first floor, adding not only weathered texture, but also a sense of romance. Architectural details—molding and paneling—give visual interest to white walls. Fireplaces were given dramatic mantels that added weight—both aesthetically and historically.

The process started in the completely renovated kitchen, where the modern mix of materials may be most evident. Walnut cabinets



Master bedroom The master bedroom was given a more masculine edge with a low, walnut headboard and a steel bedside table. A simple stone surround modernized the fireplace. **Master bath** Thornton says the master bath went from “highly decorative to stripped down.”

BEFORE





and drawers were given brass edging—masculine meets elegant. Dark soapstone countertops contrast with a backsplash of classic white subway tiles. A white oak island inspired by French farm tables is topped with marble and accessorized with woven baskets. A La Cornue range in stainless steel and brass shines (literally) when book-ended with white-painted brick and rustic, reclaimed oak shelves.

In the long, narrow living room, eye-catching pieces and Art Deco references are arranged in striking vignettes—standing out against the stark white backdrop and creating staccato design notes that flow seamlessly thanks to Thornton’s trained eye.

“If you’re afraid of color, don’t be afraid of drama,” Thornton advises. “It’s all about texture and contrast. With a neutral palette, you have to incorporate daring or sculptural pieces that stand out and make your eyes dance around the room.”

Dance they do—from the black marble fireplace surround and the industrial steel pedestal table to the Art Deco desk with channeled legs paired with a leather chair with a delicate steel frame.

In a departure from the main floor’s primarily white palette, the dining room and den are saturated in dark, moody hues—dark mink grass cloth in the dining room and a deep blue-gray ceiling plus rich wood paneling in the den—that haughtily contrast with

the rest of the house. “The palettes took a little talking into,” Thornton says, laughing. “It’s easy to get behind light and bright, but moody is different. What excites me is the drama.”

That goes for furnishings as well as color schemes. The custom dining room table’s organic-looking base and neutral hue make it seem to grow out of the floor. An overscale sofa in steel-blue mohair in the den plays against the warmth of the mahogany walls.

Upstairs, the team’s watchword, honest, again prevails. Not just when referring to materials, but also to embracing the master bedroom’s rather asymmetrical appearance. “The master bedroom and bath have very interesting shapes and angles to them,” Thornton notes. “Instead of trying to camouflage that, we accentuated it.” The angles are most obvious in the master bath, where the designer emphasized their graphic nature by highlighting the contrast between the white subway tiles on the walls and the warm oak of the ceiling.

It’s that contrast—and a mix of honest materials—that have breathed new life into a beloved family home. “Summer helped us keep the charm and coziness that this house has always had, but she’s given it a new, modern life,” Neil says. “It’s magical.”

Interior designer: Summer Thornton **For information, see sources on page 118**