Past Perfected

A family updates a Lake of the Isles manse for modern living

BY JOEL HOEKSTRA | PHOTOS BY TROY THIES

Purchasing a house on Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis's tony Kenwood neighborhood comes with a certain obligation. The historic value of the Tudor, Victorian, and Spanish Revival residences is self-evident. Newcomers are quickly schooled in the code of the neighborhood: You might pay the mortgage, but you are a caretaker, honoring the property's legacy and preserving it for future generations.

So the neighbors were watching closely when a couple and their children moved into a 100-year-old Mediterranean villa on the lake's west side in 2012. The new owners intended to honor the past, but they wanted to refresh and lighten the interiors, and create a designated play area for the kids. They also wanted to add a pool in the back and landscaping out front that would make the most of the home's enviable lake views. "We loved the history and character of the house—that's why we bought it," says the homeowner. "But we also wanted to make it a place where we could live and relax, a place where our kids could spread out."

The previous owner had initiated some updates. She remodeled the kitchen with riff-cut oak cabinets and marble countertops, and replaced a porte-cochere on the home's north side with a bright and sunny breakfast room. Several narrow exterior doors made way for wider French doors flanked by windows, allowing more natural light into the home's interior. "We really liked what she had started," the current homeowner says, "so we continued her vision and added as we went along."

They began with structural changes. Additional exterior doors were similarly converted into French doors and windows, and the entire exterior of the home was freshly

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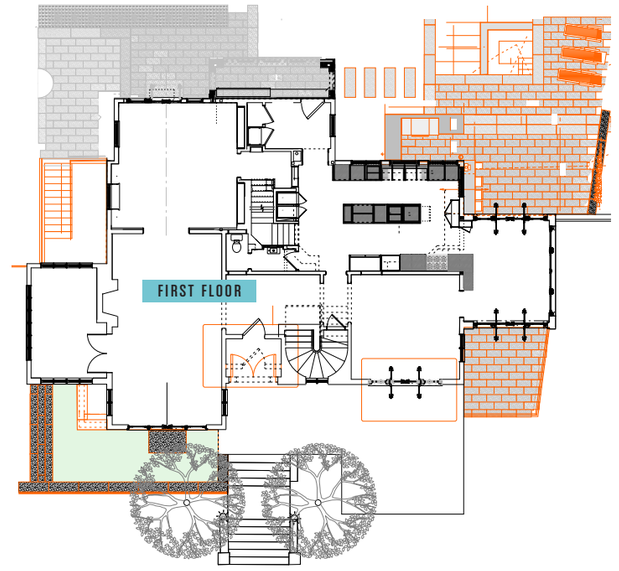
resources

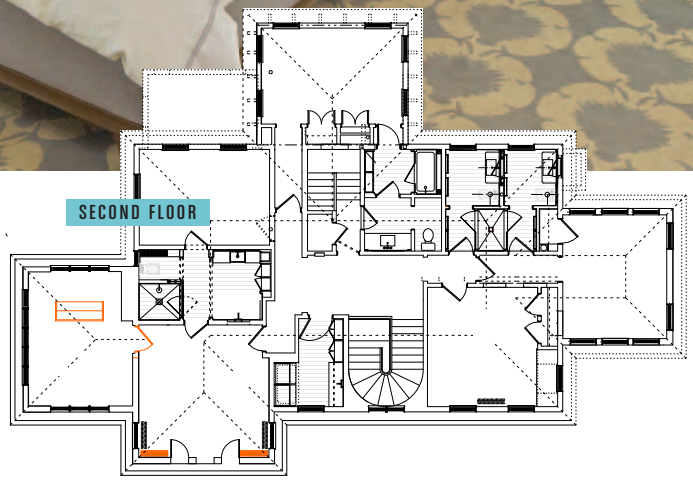
INTERIOR DESIGNER: MARTHA O'HARA INTERIORS
BUILDER: JOHN KRAEMER & SONS
LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: TOPO, LLC

BEFORE PHOTOS BY LANDMARK PHOTOGRAPHY



EXTERIOR PHOTO COURTESY OF TOPO, LLC

TOP The bench in the mudroom offers a seat for putting on boots and plenty of storage space. **ABOVE** Terraces that echo the exterior stucco of this Mediterranean villa were part of its recent update.



stuccoed and dashed. A new HVAC system replaced radiators and poorly functioning air-conditioning units throughout the house.

To create additional living space for the kids in the basement, builder John Kraemer & Sons demolished an enormous loadbearing wall under the center of the house and replaced it with a steel beam and posts weighing 9,000 pounds. "It's probably one of the biggest structural improvements we've ever done to a house," says Kraemer. "You have to be careful: If the house shifts even a little bit, you might see cracks in the walls upstairs."

With structural changes complete, the couple and their design team moved on to finishes and furnishings. The heavy dark-wood beams that supported the ceilings were white-enameled, making the space feel brighter and lighter. The carved-stone façade of the fireplace was left intact, further spotlighting the elegant but muted decorative touches throughout the house.

Interior designer Kristy Conlin of Martha O'Hara Interiors stuck to a mostly neutral palette: grays, silvers, blacks, blues, and whites. The patterns incorporated in each room, ranging from geometrics to tropical palm leaf, add variety and character to the spaces. In the master bedroom on the second floor, for example, the curves and details match an old wing-backed chair the couple bought early on in their relationship. "The piece had great lines, tufting, and velvet fabric," Conlin says. "We painted and reupholstered it with bold geometric

Curves meet geometry in the master bedroom and adjoining office. An old wing-backed chair got an update with paint and new upholstery in bold fabric. "It just added fun to the entire room," says interior designer Kristy Conlin.

fabric, and it just added fun to the entire room."

In the newly opened-up basement, the design is more modern—unconstrained by the house's historic nature. A children's play space features small desks, a lofted area for naps, and a wall on which youngsters can doodle and draw. A family room with a large, flat-screen TV and a limestone-encircled fireplace serves as the hub of the basement, complete with loads of storage space for games and toys and a reading nook. Meanwhile, adults can make the most of the bar, the walk-in wine cellar, and a spacious exercise room furnished with a treadmill, mirrors, and free weights. There's also a mudroom with a newly added egress to the backyard.

"We wanted a bunker where the whole family could hunker down," the homeowner says of the base-

LEFT AND BELOW In the basement, the design is more colorful and modern. The children's play space features small desks, a lofted area for naps, and loads of storage space.

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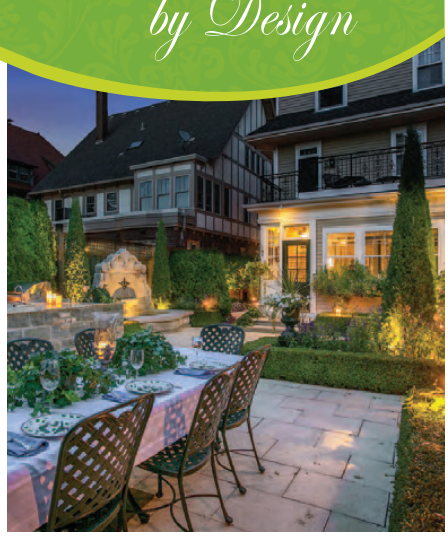

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The front foyer of the gracious home showcases the elegant neutral palette and hints at the fresh fun to come.

ment space. "Sometimes we're all down here doing different things."

Outside, landscaping also made the property more livable for the family. In front of the house, Scott Ritter, senior project manager at St. Paul landscape design firm Topo, created a terraced effect by adding stone retaining walls that echo the house's stucco exterior. He carefully worked around the stately old trees to maximize the connection to the parkway and the lake.

In the backyard, columnar maples loom over travertine planks imported from Turkey. A small swimming pool is screened from nearby houses by a row of arborvitae. The entire scene is visible from a small carriage house apartment over the garage. "Sometimes, our guests are happy to have a place to escape the family chaos for a while," the homeowner says with a laugh.

In the end, all the design changes have made an historic house homier. "The place always felt gracious to us in a Old World kind of way," the homeowner says. "But now it also feels like our home, something modern, something special for our family." MH

JOEL HOEKSTRA IS A TWIN CITIES FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR.

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