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How to Renovate a Midcentury Home for 21st-Century Living

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Minneapolis-based McMonigal Architects breathed new life into a midcentury house in Portland, Oregon, by creating large, light-filled rooms. The clients wanted to open up the home's dark and confined spaces and connect them to the outdoors. Solutions included removing several interior walls, reorganizing spaces, enlarging windows, and adding a small glass-walled foyer.

1

Enhance interior to exterior connections.

Midcentury houses are especially conducive to seamless indoor-outdoor flow. Building elements such as roof beams and ceiling planes often extend from inside to outside, for example, and large sliding-glass doors and expansive panes of glass were first introduced during this era. Ask your architect to study the proportions and placement of windows and doors for visual and physical connections. Portlanders know the outdoor environment stimulates healthy living. Here the decks and patios extend the indoor rooms. Even the slate flooring, which was reused in the foyer, was inset into the front concrete walk to continue the flow.

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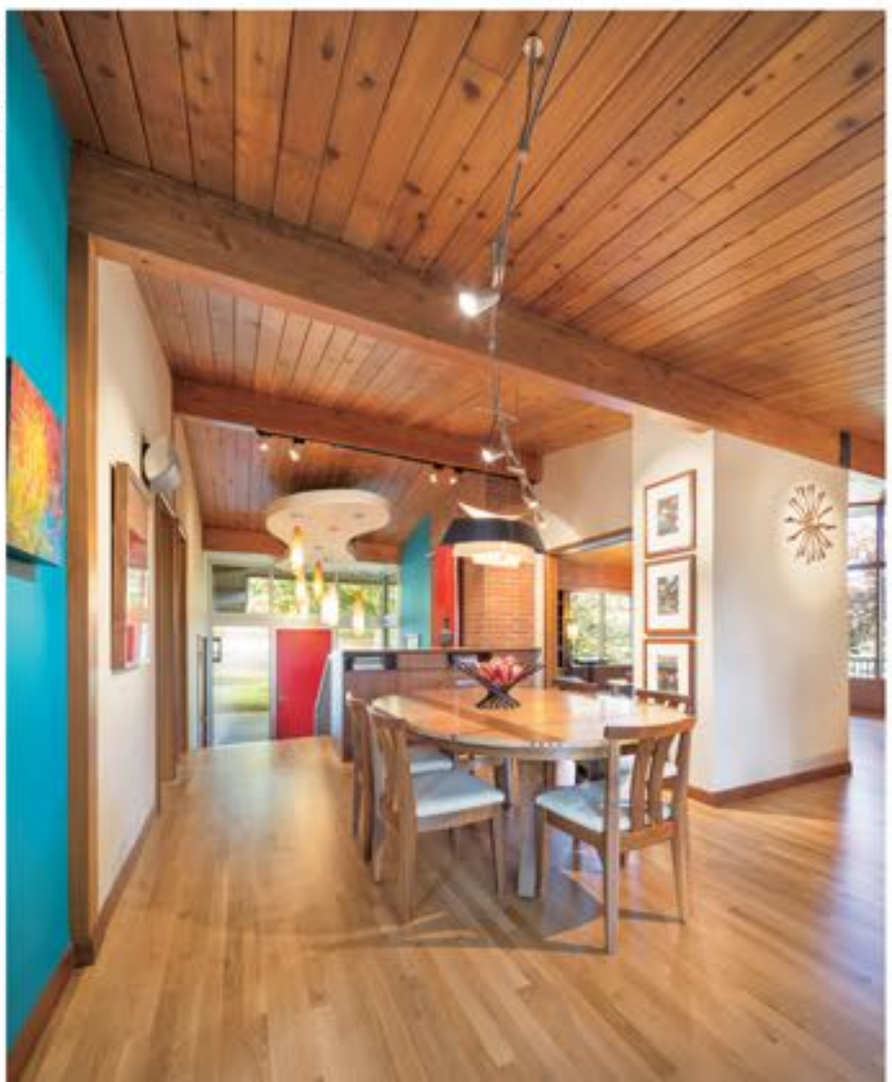
3

Use materials compatible with the era.

Nothing preserves the character of a classic midcentury house more than retaining the original exposed beams, flat planes, and soaring ceilings. Commonly used materials included wood, glass, brick, and slate. Replicating existing finishes is admirable in true restoration, but also consider more environmentally friendly materials. The original mahogany in this house is no longer sustainable, so American walnut was selected for fine-grained cabinets, to contrast with existing fir walls and cedar ceilings.

For more information on this project, visit *www.mcmonigal.com*.



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2

Preserve room definition while creating openness.

You don't need to remove every interior wall to achieve openness. This renovation preserved the distinct volumes of the rooms and existing elements such as the fireplace and stairs. Identifying wasted space is key to expanding rooms. The large, dark paneled hall at the top of the stairs became part of the relocated dining room, now wide open to the fir trees in the back yard. Architects are particularly skilled at assessing structure and reorganizing spaces for function, flow, and aesthetics. The openness was gained by removing walls and adding beams that match the original structure.