HOMES
& GARDENING

EVERYDAY SOLUTIONS

Rambler gets Prairie retrofit

Stone fireplaces, wood accents add Craftsman charm to a 1990s suburban home.

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GREG PAGE
The living room's new stone fireplace adds dimension and warmth.

Ben and Brenda Marks are big fans of Prairie-style architecture. So when they built their Minnetonka rambler in 1996, the exterior facade was a mix of horizontal stone and wood banding. But the couple didn't have the resources or expertise to continue the earthy theme in the interiors.

"Inside, it was a basic suburban home — with the giant wall cabinet to hold the giant 1990s TV, which was wasted space as technology changed," Ben said. Other design drawbacks were two poorly positioned fireplaces that the family rarely turned on to enjoy the gas-log ambience. The couple sought a design plan that would add a Prairie-style sensibility to the interiors, create more open areas with better traffic flow and make those fireplaces warmer and more welcoming.

"We had 2,500 square feet, so there was plenty of space," said Ben. "We just weren't maximizing it."

To find out how they did it, see **SOLUTIONS** on H3 ►

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Everyday Solutions appears once a month in the Homes section as a showcase for projects, by AIA Minnesota member architects, that solve a homeowner's everyday design challenge. The program is a partnership between the Star Tribune and the Minnesota chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

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The challenge: The exterior of Ben and Brenda Marks' Minnetonka rambler evokes the look of Prairie-style architecture. But the interiors were stuck in the 1990s with basic maple woodwork, beige carpet and walled-in rooms. The homeowners wanted to add Prairie-influenced architectural details, as well as create an easy flow between the main-floor living spaces. At the same time, they wanted to turn the living and family rooms — which held unappealing, rarely used fireplaces — into inviting gathering areas.

The team: Architect Rosemary McMonigal of McMonigal Architects, Minneapolis, mcmonigal.com, and interior designer Gigi Olive.

The solution: The renovation project involved knocking down three walls — including the large floating structure that held the TV cabinet — to gain more functional square footage and open up and connect the main floor. The team repositioned and redesigned the fireplaces in the living and family rooms, turning them into a focal point. They also improved and updated the 1990s kitchen, while keeping the existing cabinets and layout. Materials including stone, wood and art glass were used to create Craftsman-detailed warm interiors.

Rosemary McMonigal

Afterthought inserts: The existing see-through gas fireplaces in the living and family rooms were off-center and undersized for the spaces, and embellished with underwhelming surrounds. "Both sides of the fireplace looked like an afterthought and were visually awkward," said McMonigal.

Hearths of the home: The newly built stone fireplaces dramatically changed the look and function of the rooms.

First, the doorway between the living room and kitchen was filled in to create a longer wall to house the larger fireplace unit and turn the long living room into one unifying conversation and gathering space.

Instead of the dated see-through style, the new stone-surround fireplaces wrap around the living and family room wall. The living room's modern linear gas insert boasts vertical flames. The family-room fireplace is a traditional log style and creates a cozy hearth room off the kitchen. "We can cook dinner, the kids can do homework, and have the fireplace on," said Ben.

As the final touch, McMonigal added cherrywood trim accents and display shelves to both units. "Now we can put out family photos and make it more homey," said Ben.

Stone style: The stone was cut thin, but still has the look of a massive stone surround, said McMonigal. The stone and cherrywood trim across the fireplaces are shaped by strong horizontal lines and other Prairie influences. "And we varied the depth of the stone cladding around the fireplace box for more architectural interest," she said.

After photos by GREG PAGE

Top The living room's repositioned and rebuilt stone fireplace creates a more inviting sitting area.
Above The other stone fireplace turned the family room into a hearth room off the updated kitchen.
Left to right The family and living rooms before the remodeling to add Prairie-style details.

Visual continuity: Now the home has a centerpiece, thanks to the new stone fireplace structure, which spans the wall dividing the family and living rooms. "The fireplace brings in Craftsman details and guides the traffic flow," said McMonigal.

Kitchen face-lift: The Markses didn't want to completely overhaul their kitchen. They decided to keep the maple cabinets, which were in good condition. But they replaced the dated multilevel island with a one-level quartz-topped island, as well as the perimeter counters. The new island holds a beverage refrigerator, and is accented with maple and cherrywood to tie it to the renovated parts of the house.

A work of glass: A custom art-glass window, designed by Michael Pilla, in the family room continues the Prairie-style motif and is aligned with an exterior window to draw in more light.

Wood character: The team replaced carpet in both rooms with dark-stained cherrywood floors, matching the wood to the existing refinished floors so spaces would flow together.

The best part: Although the home's footprint remained the same, the remodeling project increased the amount of usable space, said McMonigal. Now it's a snap to position furniture and sit in front of a fire.

"The fireplaces add a warm and comfortable feeling and give our home a really awesome Prairie feel," said Ben.

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