# renewed spaces

**A couple finds their needs fulfilled within existing walls**

BY KIRA OBOLENSKY

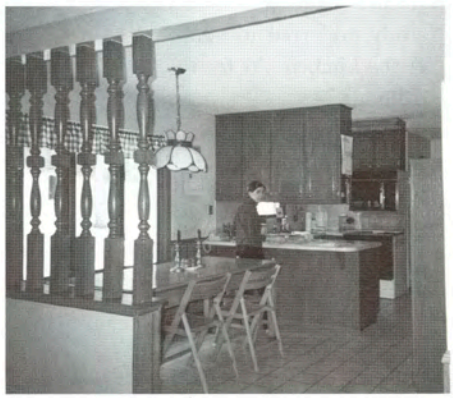
PHOTO BY KAREN MELVIN

After their children left the nest, Jamie and Mark Markoe's first impulse was to build an addition to their 1970s Colonial. Besides showing 14 years of wear and tear from three active children, the house needed a new family room, sunroom, and entryway—or so the Markoes thought. Only then, they were convinced, would the house work.

"We lived for 14 years in the house, but we were so busy raising kids, it wasn't until they left that we had the energy to remodel," explains Jamie Markoe.

She and her husband enlisted architect Rosemary McMonigal, principal of McMonigal Architects in Minneapolis, who took one look at the four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bathroom home and gave the couple a quick reality check: Their empty-nester urge to add-on was really frustration with how the house worked on a daily basis. The way McMonigal saw it, the Markoes did not need any more rooms; instead, the rooms they had needed to be reworked to their best capacity. By making the most of the existing footprint, McMonigal and intern

**A spacious kitchen flooded with sunlight and warmth replaced the once dark, cramped room.**



architect Jennifer Hilla Schlag felt certain that the Markoes could have all the rooms they wanted without adding a single square foot to their existing 2,000 square foot home.

Though beautifully situated in a community of rolling hills outside White Bear Lake, the Markoes' home was stuck in a time warp. A series of small rooms, each divided from another with a door, marked the first level. The dining and living rooms were used only once or twice a year. The family preferred to hang out in a run-down family room off the kitchen. As for the house's style, remarks Jamie, "it had none."

The first order of business was to reorganize the first level to improve the flow and function of the existing rooms. "All this emphasis on extreme makeovers is really counterintuitive," McMonigal says. "The best sort of approach to remodeling is to try and understand the strengths of a house and work with them."

The biggest space in the Markoes' home, she discovered, was the living room. "It had windows, a fireplace, and it could easily become that new family room that they wanted," McMonigal said, "if only you could get to it." To connect the space to the rest of the house, she suggested that a wall be removed, visually joining the room to the kitchen.

The Markoes' desire for a sunroom was something McMonigal and Schlag felt was really driven by a lack of light in the existing home. By removing a wall that separated the kitchen from the dining room, they flooded the kitchen area with sunlight from two directions. They brightened the living room by adding windows to the western wall.

Once the room flow and lighting were reorganized to address the Markoes' essential needs, more aesthetic preferences could be addressed. "We really wanted the opposite of what existed," says Jamie. "But we didn't want anything too sleek or modern."

The Markoe house now expresses a classic and comfortable style that begins at the front door. A dramatic new entrance features a front porch that extends to a pergola over the front walkway. It functions practically, providing

PHOTO BY PETER CROUSER

**LEFT** A new fireplace surround, mullioned windows, and built-in cabinetry give light and life to the previously unused living room.

**ABOVE** Details of the new front entry and pergola are repeated over the garage doors.

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Removing a wall between the dining room and kitchen allowed light and conversation to flow between the two rooms.

shelter from the elements, and it restores everyday use of the front door. The geometric pattern of the pergola's bisecting beams is reinterpreted throughout the renovation.

The fireplace, formerly diminutive and trimmed with molding, is now adorned with a painted white millwork surround and brackets that mimic those on the pergola. Its generous scale and graceful proportions make it the focal point in the living room. Built-in cabinetry along the south wall provides a long, low window seat that hides equipment and CD storage. A bow window was replaced with double-hung mullioned windows that mirror the two windows on the opposite wall. The room feels bright, light, and classically comfortable.

The former 8.5-foot-long kitchen has tripled in length, encompassing most of what had been the original family room. Simple details, such as custom oak cabinets, painted white maple and glass cupboards, and a sweep of aquamarine countertops, create a warm, somewhat Swedish sensibility. Three painted wood ceiling beams help offer proportion and scale to the long space. A long center wooden island creates an informal spot for eating and an enviable sweep of work surface.

The dining room, now open to the kitchen, is ideal for guests. "We can accommodate big groups and small with equal ease now," remarks Jamie, whose entertaining urges have greatly increased since the remodel. No longer a formal dining room, the space has found everyday use as a comfortable extension of the kitchen. A nook in the room, formerly reserved for a sideboard, now holds a small couch where family and friends can relax and still stay connected

to the activity in the kitchen.

A mudroom connects the existing garage entrance, where shoes and coats had often collected, to the new kitchen. Built-in cabinets and coat storage keep the area tidy. The laundry facilities, which had been in the basement, were brought upstairs and placed in a small, bright room off the kitchen. Putting these two functions where they belong help make the house work just the way the Markoes wanted.

New oak floors unify the first-level rooms. The bathrooms also were updated with classic, neutral porcelain tiles and fixtures. Two pedestal sinks that the Markoes retrieved from Mark's father were resurfaced for a spruced up finish on a classic form.

After transforming their house into one that better meets their needs, these empty-nesters aren't ready to fly the coop anytime soon. In fact, they're already planning their next remodeling project. They intend to add an exercise room, darkroom, and a home theatre to their basement. Jamie can now easily envision the dark and somewhat dingy space transformed in much the same way as the rest of the house. Without adding on, the Markoes, along with McMonigal, plan on reinventing the place where their children once played into one where they can do the same. ■

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**BELOW Neutral tile and fixtures update the hall bath. RIGHT A mudroom with handy built-ins connects the garage entrance to the kitchen and laundry.**

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