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The Mission to Preserve a Legacy



Couple renovates with history and nostalgia in mind

Text by
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AIA of Albers Chang Architects

Construction by
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Carlos Cantu of Cantu Maintenance
Construction Services (interior)

Landscape design by
Albers Chang Architects

Interiors by
Ali and Frank Donnelly
(homeowners)

Few homes have a history as intricately woven into the lives of their stewards as Frank and Ali Donnelly's.

Located in an established neighborhood, the home has historical charm, a renovation and addition that are sensitive to the scale of its surroundings, and architectural history. In 2013, Frank purchased the 1,800-square-foot one-story bungalow with the intent to fully renovate the 1930s-era house. It would come to be Frank and Ali's first home together, but it is not where the story of the Donnelly house begins.

For several years after college, Frank rented the duplex next door to the house. He'd always admired the historical details of this stucco and red brick bungalow and the potential it promised. Too, Frank loved the great location and community of the Winlow Place neighborhood in the Museum District, and he envisioned raising his own family here one day.

THESE PAGES: Historically appropriate paint colors were selected for the exterior materials – the deep brown (Sherwin-Williams Van Dyke Brown) and the contrasting beadboard soffit is an olive drab Sherwin-Williams High Tea. The second floor addition left the existing front porch and brick walls of the first floor fully intact. | The new expanded kitchen and butler's pantry beyond are fitted with a period-appropriate ceramic farm sink, brushed nickel fixtures and cabinet hardware. The glass cabinet doors were reused from the original kitchen and breakfast room, and the cabinet brackets and feet were duplicated from the original cabinets. The decorative beams are a subtle reference to the exterior corbels, including the same paint color used outside.

BEFORE



The existing brick bungalow was built in 1930, shortly after the formation of Winlow Place Addition.

BEFORE



The existing kitchen renovated in the 1980s, neither narrow enough for a galley kitchen nor wide enough for a proper island, was expanded to accommodate a usable island flanked by custom full-height Shaker-style cabinets. The original single-hung sash windows above the sink fully retract into a pocket in the exterior wall.



Frank eventually purchased a property not far away, but when his former neighbors were ready to downsize, Frank made an offer on the bungalow. A few months after purchasing the home, Frank proposed to Ali in its kitchen.

The couple loved the architectural integrity of the home and its unique period details, but wished to expand the two-bedroom, one-bath house. Specifically they wanted to add a master suite, laundry room and second floor veranda, while maintaining the original character of the home. A 1930s-era house such as this wasn't conceived with a spacious master suite in mind, so creating a haven was high on the couple's "must haves" list. Incidentally, the washer and dryer were found in the original unfinished basement (yes, this Houston

home has a basement), with access via an ingenious but steep pull-out stair.

To accomplish this project, the couple assembled their professional team. NuNu Chang of Albers Chang Architects was hired as the architect. "We interviewed several architects, but immediately got along with NuNu," said Frank. "Her talent was immediately evident, but as the project progressed, we admired her strength in managing us toward decision-making throughout the process."

With the desire to have a high level of involvement in the renovation of the home, Frank's extensive experience in commercial real estate management as a partner at Kensinger Donnelly afforded him access to many building trades. The couple hired Keeland Associates for the exterior framing



and dry-in (weather-proofing) after seeing the quality of work Burdette had done on Frank's business partner's house. Frank contracted the interior finish work with site supervision by Carlos Cantu.

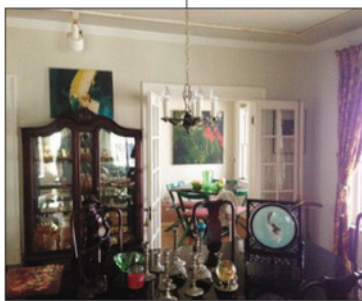
In some neighborhoods of this era in Houston, building restrictions with the laudable aim of preserving the original structure can result in the appearance of a bulky addition to the rear of the house. While there were no such restrictions here, it was a primary goal of the project team to respect the original struc-

ture and scale of the neighborhood. So the architect proposed locating the master suite addition directly above the existing structure, for the house to appear as if it had always been a two-story, foursquare-style bungalow. This scheme would allow the preservation of their backyard and the opportunity for a new double-height stair hall to become the center of the house, flooding the interior with natural light throughout the year.

It can be a reach for a client to come around to a less common solution, but Frank and Ali,

The architect proposed that not only should the single arched opening be preserved, but that it should become an organizing element among the main spaces. To emphasize this en-flade effect, the two expansive arched openings now bookend smaller arched openings with reeded glass doors.

BEFORE



While original to the house, the rectangular French doors between the dining and breakfast felt confining in contrast to the large elliptical arched opening.

BEFORE



One of the most dramatic features of the existing house was the lone elliptical arched cased opening that occurred only between the living and dining room.

Historical details from the existing house, a vaguely Mission-style brick and stucco bungalow, were incorporated and enhanced.

The homeowners desired the former parlor to be used as a home office, with Shaker style cabinetry and paneling reminiscent of a formal, yet warm and inviting library. | The expansive stair hall/gallery forms the new vertical connection between the main first floor spaces and secondary bedrooms and master areas above. Clerestory windows filter natural light through the space and the double-height wall will become a gallery for the owners' growing art collection.



both open-minded and thoughtful, loved the idea that “by re-working the narrative of the house we could preserve its historical aspects while making it suitable for today’s lifestyle,” said Chang.

The addition is defined by a continuous stucco band, serving as both window sill and balcony rail. The new generous two-foot-deep horizontal beadboard soffit is bracketed with custom-milled cedar corbels for effective shade and dramatic contrast against the white stucco. Representative of authentic clay brick and stucco construction, the new second floor windows are deeply recessed into the exterior walls. The result is seamless, classic and period-correct.

Historical details from the existing house, a vaguely Mission-style brick and stucco bungalow, were incorporated and enhanced. The paint selections, too, are historically appropriate. On the exterior, the new decorative corbel brackets are painted a deep brown, and the contrasting beadboard soffit is an olive drab. A neutral palette of simple white walls and dark wood floors throughout the interior allows the Donnellys an opportunity to accentuate their home with unique furniture and art from their extensive travels.

Tackling the interior issues involved solving a few problems that are not unusual when redesigning a 1930s home for today. In the existing layout, the circulation was fragmented and resulted in a bottleneck in the breakfast room and windowless bedroom vestibule, and the





At the top of the stair hall / gallery, an intimate master sitting room leads to a private veranda. To lend a visual lightness throughout the second floor aerie, a kerfed drywall detail was used instead of wood casing for the doors and windows.



The new master bath with Carrara marble countertops and free-standing vanities overlooks the street.

kitchen led directly to the rear bedroom.

In the new first floor scheme, the main spaces (living, dining, kitchen and sun-room) were straightened and arranged enfilade — the suite of rooms artfully, mindfully, and formally aligned — and feature a series of new arched cased openings to emphasize this effect.

The kitchen was expanded to accommodate a usable island flanked by custom full-height Shaker-style cabinets. Another ingenious feature of the original house, the original single-hung sash windows above the sink fully retract into a concealed pocket in the wall. The couple loves the new expanded kitchen.

“It is appropriately sized to the house,” said Ali. “It is large enough to accommodate a gathering, but small enough to cook in effectively. Also, I absolutely love how the preserved cabinet doors and pocket windows blend the new with the original so beautifully.”

The master suite is spa-like and luxurious with Carrara marble floors and countertops and light-filled Carrara tile shower. Northern light filters into the room providing a soft wash of natural light.

The outdoor spaces are special, too. The original front porch is now flanked by a pair of shade gardens with planting selected by the architect, perfect for Houston’s hot summer days. And the neighborhood beckons. The close proximity to great restaurants, coffee shops and grocery stores is ideal for the couple.

“The whole community is pedestrian-friendly,” said Ali, “so we walk to as many places as possible on a daily basis.”

And the basement? The original full-height basement formed of cast-in-place concrete walls will one day become the Donnellys’ wine room. They also have plans to renovate the garage to make room for another car and an outdoor work space.

With the first phase of this idyllic home completed, and three years of marriage, Frank and Ali’s home could be described as perfect. But the home was still missing something special — so the Donnellys went back to work on another addition. The couple’s home now brims with the light, laughter and love of a new baby — their first — happily welcomed in early February. ●