

We have loved living in our Minneapolis 1904 four-square for 24 years – and plan to stay well into retirement. As we planned our home’s addition, we recognized the realities of our aging bodies in relationship to a home with no first story sleeping areas or bathrooms. We provided these desires to our design team.

- A first floor ¾ bath
- Screen porch, such that we:
 - Live part of the year “outside”, enjoying our urban natural surroundings
 - Interact with neighbors, passing bikers, and pedestrians
 - Still feel “inside” for private conversations and dinner parties.
- A patio for lunchtime sandwiches in the sun, screened a bit by greenery.
- Architecture that mirrored the wide variety of buildings, lifestyles, and cultures of our neighborhood – Minneapolis’s first – filled with the excitement of the U.
- Solutions to reduce storm water runoff, as we’ve seen more than a couple submerged cars in the intersection out front during torrential summer storms.
- A project that respects limited resources (dollars and site space)
- A design you wouldn’t find in a 19th century planbook, but would be comfortable in a neighborhood with 100-year old homes and 70s “urban renewal” – “funky respectful”

Our site has two structures (house & garage) along with a driveway on the west side (no alley), all on a 65’ X 70’ lot. For construction, the west and north sides were out of the question due to setbacks and the driveway location. We did not want to disturb the historic integrity of the front (south) side of the house, and setbacks would have made this difficult anyway. This left the east side, which like the south, fronts a public street. To complicate things, the east side of the house had three mature trees we wanted to save, including an ornamental Hawthorne and a majestic spruce.

We found an architect, builder, and landscape architect able to navigate these limitations effectively, creating a stunning addition that we happily use daily, and by unconventional logic, saved us money. We don’t need a northern retreat, the porch is our cabin! The neighbors are equally smitten, offering us frequent unsolicited endorsements. “Love your porch!” they shout into our yard as they walk or bike by.

These serendipitous conversations (or the occasional alcohol-fueled diatribes) aren’t uncommon in a neighborhood where students live and gather, which is why attention to detail is much appreciated. The wood slats on the porch (reclaimed redwood from wine barrels – a divine smell) offer privacy without sacrificing beauty. The windows in the addition flood the bath with light, yet allow one to take a shower without drawing curtains (or risking arrest). The green roof provides a pastoral foreground for upstairs occupants as well as people on the sidewalk, while hiding the bulk of the roof area. This kept the scale of the addition smaller, preserved our second floor windows, and provided a bit more light to our northern neighbor. Permeable paving on our patio and the green roof up top provide useable outdoor space without increasing the burden on the storm water system. Sitting on the porch reading the paper, our son’s paintings hung on the walls, colorful furniture scattered about, vaguely aware of the whiz of a passing cyclist’s freewheel, we are tremendously grateful for where we are.