

A New Old House for 5

Nick and Bre knew that their young family would someday outgrow their house, but in August 2007, the news of impending twins brought that future into clear and urgent focus. Living in Linden Hills in a story-and-a-half bungalow that they had already remodeled, they decided to find a small house and expand it. Fortunately, they quickly found a small but time-worn one-bedroom bungalow nearby that fit the bill.

Nick, a partner at a Minneapolis residential contracting firm, knew from experience that saving the existing and foundation and main floor structure would save considerable construction time and money. Nick and Bre were also keenly aware of the generations of old houses (one side of the street was built in the 1910's, the other in the late 1920's) that gave their block considerable charm, and they did not want the house to upset that character. The homeowners and designer paid close attention from the outset of the design process to respecting and integrating the textures of the surrounding neighborhood.

The new design called for the carriage of the house expanded to two floors, with the upstairs taking on 4 bedrooms and a bath. The new height of the house warranted a steeper roof that echoed neighboring rooflines of the nearby late Victorians, rather than a bungalow roof that would look like a squat cap. Siding materials, porch proportions, trim, and window and eave proportions were all carefully considered to lend an older feel to the exterior, while allowing a fully 21st-Century interior and lifestyle.

Where small amounts of extra space were needed, several bays were added to the sides of the house, giving the newly-tall structure some relief and breaking up what would otherwise be some unforgiving massing.

One boon to the design was the allowance of a front porch extending into the front yard. While the existing bungalow's porch had long since been enclosed, Nick and Bre seized upon the opportunity to have a very old-fashioned, personally-scaled, and comfortable face on the street. The driveway nestled in close to the house, where new landscaping and the neighbor's mature gardens give it a clean and comfortable definition. A back deck overlooking the yard gave a more private play area for the children, and the overgrown shrubs and vines of the existing backyard were cleared to make way for shade trees that should grace the neighborhood for generations.

The contractors worked extraordinarily quickly without compromising quality, aided by time-conscious decision-making by Nick and Bre, and the family moved in before the twins were born. Nick, Bre, their son, and the new twins spent the next spring meeting their new neighbors in a new house that looked like it had been there a long time.