

Shoehorned onto a 31-foot corner lot, kitty corner from Lake Harriet School's Upper Campus, Bill and Heidi's home needed new siding, roofing, and some updates.

*"We want an efficient, colorful, and sustainable house for us and our cats and we want to stay here. We've been thinking about expanding, but don't have much room in back. We don't really need much space, but we do want it customized for us in detail."*

In preparation for our first meeting, we received a 73-page PDF with goals, an overview and survey of the current house, likes and dislikes, ideas for the renovation, and dozens of pictures and sketches explaining their vision. The level of detail was impressive, if daunting. We had a feeling their attention to detail would be acute.

Our subsequent collaboration added 240 square feet to the existing footprint of 625, focusing on the objective of providing more daylight to the interior without sacrificing privacy in the narrow 1,700 square foot home. The front of the home retained its scale, shape, porch, and window sizes, while the side gables (including a W. 49th St. facade) grew slightly. The two sides were redesigned with new window locations, derived solely from the functions - showering, reading, sleeping, eating - taking place behind them. The rear facade's asymmetric gable provides a small sun spot for lounging cats off the master bedroom. The bold colors on the narrow lap and shake siding were chosen by the homeowners to provide a striking contrast to the black, brown, and white landscape we Minnesotans share six months of the year.

Inside, Bill and Heidi asked us for efficient spaces which could fulfill two or three functions. We settled on an open plan for the first floor and the public functions of the house. Upstairs, a home office and library can be open to one another or separated by a sliding bookcase, transforming library into guest room. The master suite occupies the remaining second floor space. Small sun-spaces on both levels create nooks for the cats and the owner's orchids.

Unique details from the original document often drove the design. The master shower was designed around a motion-activated drinking fountain mounted low on the wall for the felines. We used a bookcase to make the sliding divider upstairs as we needed space somewhere for the owners' large collection of science fiction books. Blown-glass light fixtures were commissioned and paint choices selected to color match certain pieces of art within Bill and Heidi's collection. Finally, we designed a litter box with motion-activated ventilation, lighting, and dual access - one entry for cats at floor level in the kitchen and another more ergonomic access two steps down in the mudroom.

They asked us to consider sustainability as well. Geothermal heating and cooling is provided via three vertical wells and a heat pump. Blown foam insulates new walls to R-33 and existing to R-21. The roof was insulated to R-50 and pitched to accept future photovoltaic panels.

The HH residence fits comfortably with the modestly-scaled homes around it, respects the owners' desire to customize to their unique lifestyle, and consumes much less energy than its neighbors.