

# The sweeping upgrade of a simple Cape Cod Bigger & better



Even in a well-loved city like Charlottesville, there are still hidden gems. Lynn Valentine had her eye on one that was just three blocks from her home on Park Street.

"I'd walked by this property for years," she said. It wasn't the house—a modest brick Cape Cod overgrown with ivy—that attracted her. It was the land: a triple-sized lot, backing up to a pond, where she imagined planting extensive ornamental gardens.

When it became available in 2009, she and her husband David Heilbronner snatched it up. "The big debate," said Heilbronner, "was do we knock down the house and start from scratch?" As veterans of three previous renovations, they weren't afraid to tackle a project and had a preference for old structures. "There was a sense about the old house that felt good, if you could look past the problems," Heilbronner said.

Ultimately, they hired architect Candace Smith to reimagine the house via a sizable new addition that would seamlessly blend with the existing structure. "I liked the thickness of the walls and the real wood-burning fireplace," said Smith of the original 1938 house. Its first floor would become dining space and a parlor, with the old kitchen transforming into a butler's pantry. Upstairs, two bedrooms needed little work to function nicely as guest rooms.

Most of the couple's living, however, would happen in the new addition. They were after a one-floor scheme to allow for aging in place, and they were interested in a kitchen and great room with easy flow. "We do a fair amount of entertaining," said Heilbronner, accustomed to a tight



kitchen at their previous house. "Here it's easy for me to cook, and for a bunch of people to help."

Smith strove to unite the feel of the original house with the Craftsman style that the couple imagined for the addition. "Our previous two houses were Victorians," said Heilbronner. "Our tastes have changed a little." Valentine added, "That was more frou-frou than we wanted to deal with. We didn't want to paint finials."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

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New outdoor spaces—a screened porch, two covered porches and a deck—helped merge old and new while also meeting another goal. “Lynn wanted the ability to get outside from anywhere,” said Heilbronner. Multiple exits and outdoor spaces invite exploration, and provide transitions to the gardens beyond where Valentine exercises her passion for the plant kingdom.

## Facelift

Neighbors could be forgiven for not recognizing the house from the street. Its exterior has utterly changed. The new addition, placed to one side, boosts the apparent mass of the house considerably. The old section has a new front porch, and the entire exterior is now taupe-colored stucco rather than the original brick.

The property’s slope allows the two-car garage to fit at ground level under the addition. “We looked at putting the garage behind the house,” said Smith, “but it was taking up prime garden space.” For accessibility and convenience, an elevator connects the garage to the main level. To soften the visual impact of the garage from the street, a trellis over the garage doors supports climbing clematis and silver lace plant.

Existing stone steps to the front entry were cramped and outdated, but the couple did like the look and feel of stone. A new stair configuration is more spacious and “gives a sense of coming through the garden,” said Smith. It also connects the present to the past—tying in further with the fieldstone fireplace that dominates the great room.

Inside, the addition engages the old house through long sightlines that travel from the great room through the old Cape. Two former windows, now dining room doorways, close with custom doors made from a four-panel Chinese screen. A new partition wall gives the suggestion of a hallway running along the front of the formal dining room, but its very wide opening allows for easy flow.

Next door, the kitchen is geared toward serious cooking. Heilbronner is an accomplished amateur chef who also runs a side business called Bone Doctors’ Barbecue Sauce. “I told David, ‘Go to town on the kitchen,’” said Valentine.

“I had been looking at oak, Mission-style kitchens,” said Heilbronner, “but I realized that was way too dark.” Having chosen reclaimed oak flooring with a rich, distressed look, the team eventually decided to go for the contrast of light-colored kitchen cabinets. Multicolored granite countertops and tumbled-marble backsplash tiles add texture and interest. A coffered ceiling lends a luxurious feel, while a rounded edge on the large center island, outfitted with bar stools, “brings people together,” as Smith said.

Just past the great room, a breakfast nook overlooks a wooded section of the property and draws in abundant light through many windows and a carefully placed skylight. A half-wall separates the nook from a stairwell and is composed of glass cabinets. “Having

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



New outdoor spaces—a screened porch, two covered porches and a deck—helped merge old and new while also making it possible to get outside from anywhere, another goal of the homeowners. Multiple exits and outdoor spaces encourage exploration and provide transitions to the gardens, where Lynn Valentine exercises her passion for the plant kingdom.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

glass on both sides allows natural light from this floor to enter the stair,” said Smith. The cabinets also provide display space for a ceramics collection.

## A place to relax

With high ceilings and big windows, the common areas have a casual, spacious feel. To the rear, the master suite is all about privacy and calm. In the bedroom, the largest windows align with a koi pond outside, making for a verdant view. “Sundays, we’ll sit here with papers and watch the world,” said Heilbronner.

A fireplace surrounded by ledgerstone tile stands in the corner. More natural stone dresses up the bathroom down the hall, with tumbled stone on the shower floor and along the chair rail, and dark soapstone for a vanity countertop.

Smith designed specific spots for certain pieces of furniture—like the vintage black dental cabinet that stands just outside the walk-in closet. It can be seen from the long hallway that leads to the master suite—a “visual treat,” Smith said.

Durable, low-maintenance materials support the couple’s goal of living here for a long time to come. Three years after the project’s completion, they are pleased with the results of their decision to save the old place. “It just seemed like the wrong thing to do to knock it down,” said Valentine.

## THE BREAKDOWN

**Total new:** 4,320 sq. ft.

**Total existing:** 1,665 sq. ft.

**Structural system:** Poured-in-place concrete foundation with engineered wood floor joists; 2’x6’ wood exterior walls and wood roof trusses; wood framing for residential elevator.

**Exterior material:** Stucco, fieldstone veneer foundation and garden walls; synthetic Azek trim and flooring for some porches; Western Red Cedar wood pergolas, Bluestone at front porch, stained and stamped concrete at rear porches; long “board” tiles for outdoor kitchen cabinetry.

**Interior finishes:** Gypsum drywall at most walls and ceilings; Hit or Miss oak flooring in main rooms, Bamboo flooring in master bedroom wing; tile flooring and wainscot in master bath and zero-entry shower; granite countertops and tumbled stone tile backsplash in kitchen by Cogswell Stone; fieldstone fireplace in great room; custom cabinetry in kitchen, butler’s pantry and outdoor kitchen; tile work at master fireplace (ledgerstone), master bath porcelain tile and natural river rock and tile for outdoor kitchen cabinetry by Sarisand Tile.

**Roof materials:** Dimensional architectural/fiberglass shingles with pre-finished, standing seam metal roofs at porches.

**Window systems:** Pella casements and double-hungs; Velux skylight.

**Mechanical systems:** High SEER Zoned HVAC system (heat pumps) with ERV for addition, hot water radiators for existing house (designed by Albemarle Heating & Air; installed by Airflow Systems, Inc.).

**General contractor:** ILEX Construction & Woodworking



High ceilings and big windows give the common areas a casual, spacious feel. In the rear of the house, the master suite is private and calm: The largest windows align with a koi pond outside.