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A BRAND NEW STORY

When the Sorcinellis found out they'd be having another child, they expanded their house upward

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The modern remodel, designed by Howells Architecture + Design and built by ReCraft Home Remodeling, doubled the size of the 1,000-square-foot home. The added second story has three bedrooms plus an office. The remodel is energy efficient and improvements included comprehensive seismic, electrical and plumbing upgrades.

PHOTOS BY ANNA M. CAMPBELL

ANNA M CAMPBELL

The interior of the remodeled 1949 bungalow is modern, open and practical. An alcove under the stairs fits a desk for Jenni Sorcinelli, who is a teacher.

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A brand new story

When the Sorcinellis found out they'd be having another child, they expanded their house upward

By Janet Eastman
The Oregonian/OregonLive

The Sorcinelli family was happily living in a 1949 bungalow squeezed onto a small lot in Southeast Portland. They made improvements, replaced the windows and remodeled the living room and fireplace.

Then Dan and Jenni Sorcinelli learned their young daughter was going to become a big sister, and suddenly their single-level home seemed too small.

Instead of looking at other properties, they looked up. By adding a second story, they doubled their living space without giving up what they love about their home and neighborhood.

With a keen design team, they were also able to keep much of the bungalow's original floor plan intact.

Homeowners feeling pinched by a too-tiny place will appreciate this story: It counters the idea of buying a larger house and jumping into the heated real estate market.

The Sorcinellis hired Howells Architecture + Design and ReCraft Home Remodeling to "stitch" a second floor to their 1,000-square-foot house. As long as they were opening up the roof and adding walls, they opted to make a high-performing modern home out of the old.

"This remodel-addition was going to be sufficiently invasive that we knew we would have the opportunity to reinvent the look of the house," says architect Michael Howells of Howells Architecture + Design. "The owners were interested in that."

The updated silhouette of the vintage bungalow is topped by a shed roof that adds a modern feature. This type of streamlined, slanted roof was less expensive and easier to frame than a gable roof, and rainwater rolls right off, Howells explains.

The distinctive shed roof, which adds visual punch, says Howells, was softened by using exterior materials shared by other older homes in the Hosford-Abernethy neighborhood. Both levels of the house are clad in traditional gray clapboard siding.

But go inside and you'll see spaces that are modern, open and practical. Look under the stairs to find a desk fitted into the alcove. It's for Jenni, who is a teacher.

Wander up to the added level and see the new master suite with a minimal-style balcony granting views to the West Hills. The second story also contains bedrooms for each of the children, a bathroom plus an office for Dan, a graphic designer who works at home full time.

The stairwell serves as a gallery for Dan's art collection.

"We are very proud of the way we upcycled our old space into the new space," says Dan. It's the "same spot but now we have our dream home."

When should a house be remodeled vs. moving to get more room and other upgrades?

Howells says it's almost always better to work with what you have. It costs a lot of money to sell a house, buy another and pay for a move.

He asks: If you like your house and your neighborhood, why not realize your goals right where you are?

He says improvements can be accomplished all at once or over time.

"Few of my clients are in a position to do everything they want to all at once, so I try to help people prioritize so they can roll out their dreams in an appropriate way," he says.

Is it more expensive to buy a larger home or stay in a significantly renovated house with Portland's construction prices?

In this case, practical and emotional reasons guided the decision.

Renovation is not convenient or inexpensive. Construction costs for this project in 2015 were roughly $210 a square foot, which is low by Portland standards. Today's cost would be about 25 percent more.

During six months of construction, the family had to move out, adding rent to their expenses.

But in the end, they moved back into a familiar, though expanded, home that has energy-efficient upgrades. For the first time, the 67-year-old house is completely insulated, reducing heating and cooling use and costs.

There had already been a first floor window replacement, so the new second-floor windows are double glazed.

The first floor continues to be served by the existing, relatively new furnace. A mini-split system was added for the second floor. "Because the house is now so well insulated, however, the interior temperature remains quite stable, so the cooling load is fairly minimal," says Howells.

Improvements also included comprehensive seismic, electrical and plumbing upgrades.

"The clients we have want to make the best of what they already own," says Amanda Gersh, business manager of Howells Architecture + Design. "A house like the Sorcinellis' would have been torn down by a builder in a heartbeat had they sold it. So there is a preservation piece here too — we like being a part of that."

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The Sorcinelli family's 1949 cottage (below) was squeezed onto a small lot in Southeast Portland's Hosford-Abernethy neighborhood. They added a second story (above) to accommodate their growing family. The updated silhouette of the vintage bungalow is topped by a shed roof that adds a modern feature.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HOWELLS (ABOVE) AND ANNA M. CAMPBELL (BELOW)