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Some Assembly Required

Transforming Rooms Into a Home

by Tabitha Kenlon

Michael and Naomi Quigley wanted to move. While they and their 15-year-old daughter loved their home in Bethesda's Westmoreland Hills, nearby construction was becoming bothersome and the traffic seemed to get worse daily. Wouldn't it be nice if Michael didn't have to drive to his office on Dupont Circle? Wouldn't it be convenient to walk a few blocks for shopping, dining, and museums? And honestly, wouldn't it be wonderful to downsize a little? The couple discovered the answer to all these questions in their new home—a top-floor condominium in the Kalorama neighborhood of Washington DC.

While many families leave the city for the suburbs, the Quigleys are ready to do the reverse. Naomi Quigley enthuses about city-life amenities like walkable attractions, and reports that her daughter now can't wait to go shopping in Adams Morgan and Georgetown and to take the Metro to school.

The family started their search for a condo, open to anything. Other than location, the most important factor was the number of bedrooms. They wanted three: one for Michael and Naomi, one for their daughter, and one that would double as an office and a guest room.

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Modern colors pair with salvaged antique light fixtures to illuminate the entry hall of this newly renovated unit in the Dresden. Original parquet floors were restored throughout the apartment.



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Sharing Spaces: Transoms carry light from the master bedroom into the master bath. Glacier glass blurs the separation of rooms.

Naomi adores historic buildings, and she'd fallen in love with the Dresden upon her first visit, before they were even looking for a condo. Completed in 1912, the Dresden is one of famed builder Harry Wardman's first luxury apartment structures. Wardman is responsible for many of Washington DC's signature buildings, including the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel and the British Embassy Ambassador's Residence. When the Quigleys found a unit in the Dresden that met all their criteria, they couldn't resist. Even though the apartment would require six months of work, cramped temporary quarters in a one-bedroom at the Park Hyatt Residences, and more than a few discussions about a golden wall, the Quigleys had a home.

Downsizing for the move was a challenge. "We had things in the attic we didn't even remember having," Quigley admits, but she describes the process as ultimately cathartic: "You don't need as much stuff as you thought you did." She estimates that about one-third of their furniture was sold or given away. She donated some furniture and her daughter's childhood toys and clothes, and sold other items to the family moving into their old home.

The hardest part was getting the new apartment ready for habitation. Renovating a space with such an important past required an imaginative and attentive architect. Raj Barr Kumar, FAIA, RIBA, principal of Barr-Kumar Architects Engineers PC, was recommended by the Quigleys' architect friend Shalom Baranes, FAIA, and was subsequently hired.

"The project has elements of restoration and preservation in it," Barr says. The pet-stained parquet wood floors were

repaired with pieces hand-cut to fit. Missing or damaged molding was recreated. The electrical and plumbing systems were completely redone. The unit was the first in the building to have its ninety-five-year-old windows replaced, which required approval from the Historic Preservation Review Board. A once-hidden skylight was revealed when the ceilings were returned to their full height of nine feet, eight inches.

With the ceilings higher, storage space could be added by constructing tall cabinets in the kitchen, and the closet space doubled by adding two rows of hanging rods, one above the other. Bathrooms were rearranged; the powder room, originally accessed via the bedroom, now has a door off the main hallway, leaving the bedroom's occupant in peace.

Since her last house's decor was "modest and traditional," Quigley was thrilled to have an opportunity to experiment with bold color. Her daughter's room is bright blue, with a bathroom done in a contrasting blue and green. The master bath is tiled in sleek ceramic gray and has glacier glass doors and transom windows to allow natural light from the bedroom into the space.

While Barr oversaw the construction, Quigley scoured estate sales and local antique shops for the perfect fixtures. Located on 18th Street in nearby Adams Morgan, the Brass Knob proved a wonderful resource for a variety of architectural antiques. The store specializes in antique hardware, restored lighting, stained glass, and many other decorative items. (A block away on Champlain, its fellow store, The Back Doors Warehouse, stocks larger items,



such as doors, bathtubs, sinks, radiators, and iron fencing.) All her searching was worthwhile: Quigley found wonderful wall sconces, 1910 glass doorknobs, and Art Deco light fixtures. In a stroke of luck, Quigley found four matching hanging Art Deco light fixtures; with Barr's approval, they were immediately procured for the entry hall.

Decades after its debut, Art Deco remains enormously popular. Known for its simple, sleek, geometric lines, the Art Deco look flourished mainly in the years between the two world wars, drawing inspiration from sources as disparate as Cubism and ancient Egyptian civilization. The distinctive designs found their way into almost every facet of life, from architecture to furnishings to fine art to the now-iconic travel posters of looming steamers and speeding trains.

Neither Quigley nor Barr wanted to mimic or re-create an Art Deco apartment as though they were Hollywood set decorators. This home would be modern, particularly the kitchen and bathrooms, but with touches that evoked the streamlined elegance of that period style. Certain vibrantly colored walls contrast harmoniously with pale glass fixtures and unobtrusive metal detailing. The colors are not overpowering, though, as a careful balance of enthusiasm and restraint is maintained throughout.

The front entrance originally looked down a long, dark green hallway into the galley kitchen. Now, a view of an expanse of yellow, illuminated by the line of antique Art Deco hanging light fixtures, ends on a golden wall. Barr and Quigley wanted the hallway to be bright and inviting, but the first choice of yellow turned out to be a little too bold, so they selected a slightly softer shade to replace it.

The end of the hall, once the door to the kitchen, was closed off to become a pantry on the other side, adding much-needed storage space. With the door sealed, though, there was a wall that could easily lend even more interest to the entry. At first, red paint was chosen. But Barr thought red was too traditional an accent color for Quigley's self-described eclectic taste, so he suggested a luminous gold. Quigley admits she needed to be convinced that the shade would work in the space, especially in conjunction with the long yellow hall. It took "many meetings," she says, and all of Barr's persuasive powers, but in the end she agreed and now adores the unique glow it gives the corridor.

With the original kitchen door closed, the new entry takes a visitor down the hall and first through the living room, with its custom-built bookshelves, and then into the dining room, boasting beautiful views and more antique light fixtures. The wall that once separated the dining room from the kitchen was opened and now provides the entrance to the kitchen, with a new marble counter and a sliding glacier-glass window above it.

Though small, the kitchen has a wealth of amenities, including a floor-to-ceiling wine refrigerator, tall wooden cabinets to maximize storage space, and a six-burner Viking gas stove. Quigley loves to cook and wanted amenities that would make entertaining simple. The taller appliances, which had once lined the wall that is now a pass-through and door, are against the facing wall. The sink has been moved to reside under the window—the view makes dishwashing almost enjoyable (but there is an electric dishwasher by the door for larger loads). Quigley indulged in a longtime desire for marble countertops. Although the Italian Carrera stone requires attention and maintenance, the results are well worth it.

Quigley has supervised renovations in her previous home as well. There, work was done bit by bit, one room at a time. "There was almost always a project going on," she says. While doing everything at once has been somewhat exhausting, she's glad it will all be done and she'll be free to enjoy what she worked so hard to achieve. It is the experience of previous renovations that led her back to Jerry De Santis of De Santis Designs for the custom wall unit in the living room. He created a maple bookcase and entertainment unit that spans the entire wall, incorporates an antique mantel, and allows space for quite a few books and a flat-screen TV—another blend of classic with modern.

An antique dresser finds a new home with contemporary bath fixtures and bold color.

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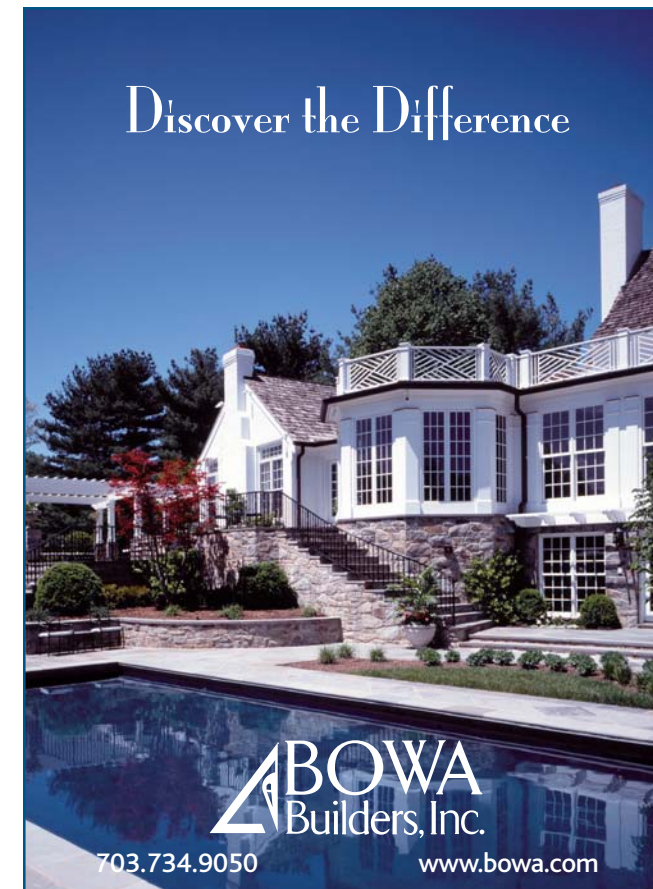
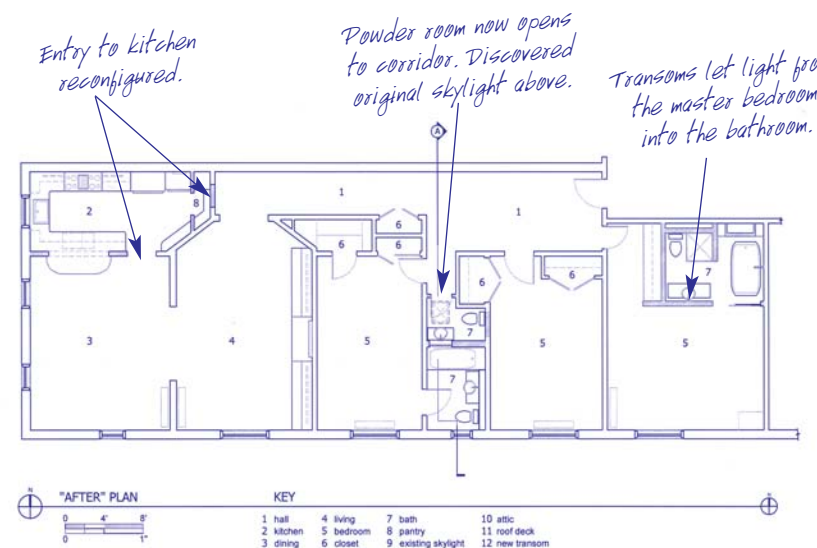


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Barr has a great deal of experience balancing old and new. He designed Ardeo Restaurant and renovated the Bombay Club and the Oval Room, all here in Washington DC. This work has helped him develop a sense for creating a unique impression in intimate quarters. "In a small space," he explains, "every sensation will be heightened." A mood can be easily established through levels of lighting and a splash of color.

Now that the painstaking drafting, drawing, discussing, and adjusting has ended, the apartment is ready for occupancy. The sound of steps in the grand hallway, the peals of laughter as guests revel in Naomi's stories of hours spent staring at different shades of yellow—these will be the finishing touches that complete the transformation from house to home.

Quigley Residence
Architect: Barr-Kumar Architects Engineers PC
Construction Management: Barr-Kumar Architects Engineers PC



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