

2023 AIA | DC Chapter Design Awards

Project Title: Middle Garden

Location: Washington, DC

Date of Completion: 10/01/2022

Project Statement:

With minimal impact on an existing home, this project set out to connect husband and wife in their separate passions of gardening and entertaining. The addition is a small but impactful appendage to a center-hall colonial, meant to transition from original structure to garden through a light filled space. We call this project Middle Garden because... the addition is in the middle of the existing vegetable garden - and it barely fits on this tight urban lot! An exterior rhythm of simple vertical windows (spaced to work with standard fiber cement cladding dimensions) provides a backdrop for the garden. The addition hovers over the ground and the vegetable plants grow up to it over the course of the planting season, eventually disguising where the building stops and the garden begins. A screened porch is set into the volume to filter light and provide for engagement with the garden through a set of generous steps falling into the garden beyond.

Design Narrative: How does this project address Design for Integration, Wellbeing, and Discovery?

Closed off from its garden previously, this project makes a significant impact on the lives of the homeowners. Barely visible from both the alley and the street, and immersed in tomato cages and blueberry bushes, this addition is an example of how to transform a center hall colonial while preserving much of the original house. In this case, the homeowners are able to immerse themselves with the food that they grow and to gather with neighbors in a new entertaining space. Unexpected as you enter through the dark front of the original house, the addition draws visitors into the garden.

Community Engagement: How does this project address Design for Equitable Communities and Economy?

Addition sizes are often maximized to justify cost per square foot against comparable properties. In this case, we were able to show our client the benefits of maintaining a human scale to their addition that is respectful of close-proximity neighbors and a tight urban alley condition behind their property. Benefits of a single story included maximizing light into the garden as well as providing the opportunity for generous openings in the ceiling plane to let more light in. A porch and garden culture, especially in an urban environment, strengthens the possibilities of shared produce and neighborhood engagement. The homeowners, already a unifier on their street, now have a place to host larger gatherings that can be accessed through their garden as a new block collector.

Sustainability and Resilience: How does this project address Design for Ecosystems, Water, Energy, Resources, and Change?

The site approach at Middle Garden maintains room for the homeowners to grow a healthy food supply on their property and supplement fresh produce for neighbors as well. Captured rainwater is used for watering the garden. The porch provides a solar buffer for the house and kitchen. The open floor plan of the new breakfast area allows for various types of seating or entertaining layouts. Large steps flowing into the garden are versatile as a gathering space, planted pot area or a sunny spot for dog sunbathing. This project, in its simple paired-back approach, can serve as an example of a modern intervention in a tight urban neighborhood without maximizing the buildable square footage.



Middle Garden

We call this project Middle Garden because... the addition is in the middle of the garden - and it barely fits!! This is a tight urban lot with a significant part of the lot dedicated to growing outdoor vegetables and cordoned off by an old brick garden garage. The husband loves to tend to his vegetables. The wife loves to cook and entertain. This project was a way to connect their two passions visually, practically intertwined with each other. The gardener and cook both in a fishbowl - and happy.

The house itself is a traditional brick center-hall colonial. With a goal of enhancing the quality of the interior's natural light, we were careful about balancing the depth of the new addition with the dramatic contributions of full-height windows and first-floor skylights.

Original pieces of the existing center-hall, such as the white paneled doors and white oak flooring, help to blend the old and new architectures. But the addition is very much an appendage transitioning from original structure to garden through a light-filled space. A screened porch off to the side is accessible from a new opening from the living room. The existing kitchen is now reconfigured to support entertaining as a new butlers pantry serving the dining room and new kitchen and living area. An original powder room blocking views to the garden and visible from the front door was slid into the addition to allow for a new visual line and pathway from the foyer through center hall to garden.



(above)
 Section through the screened porch showing the new relationship between the living room, the porch, and the steps down to the existing garden. Tomatoes, blueberry bushes, squash, cucumbers, corn, figs and many varieties of peppers are being grown for use in the kitchen.



(left)
 This intervention into an urban site is located at the edge of Washington DC, nestled into an urban, walkable neighborhood.

(right)
 We intentionally kept cabinetry off of the east elevation as much as possible to draw the garden's foliage and texture in to the experience of the kitchen.

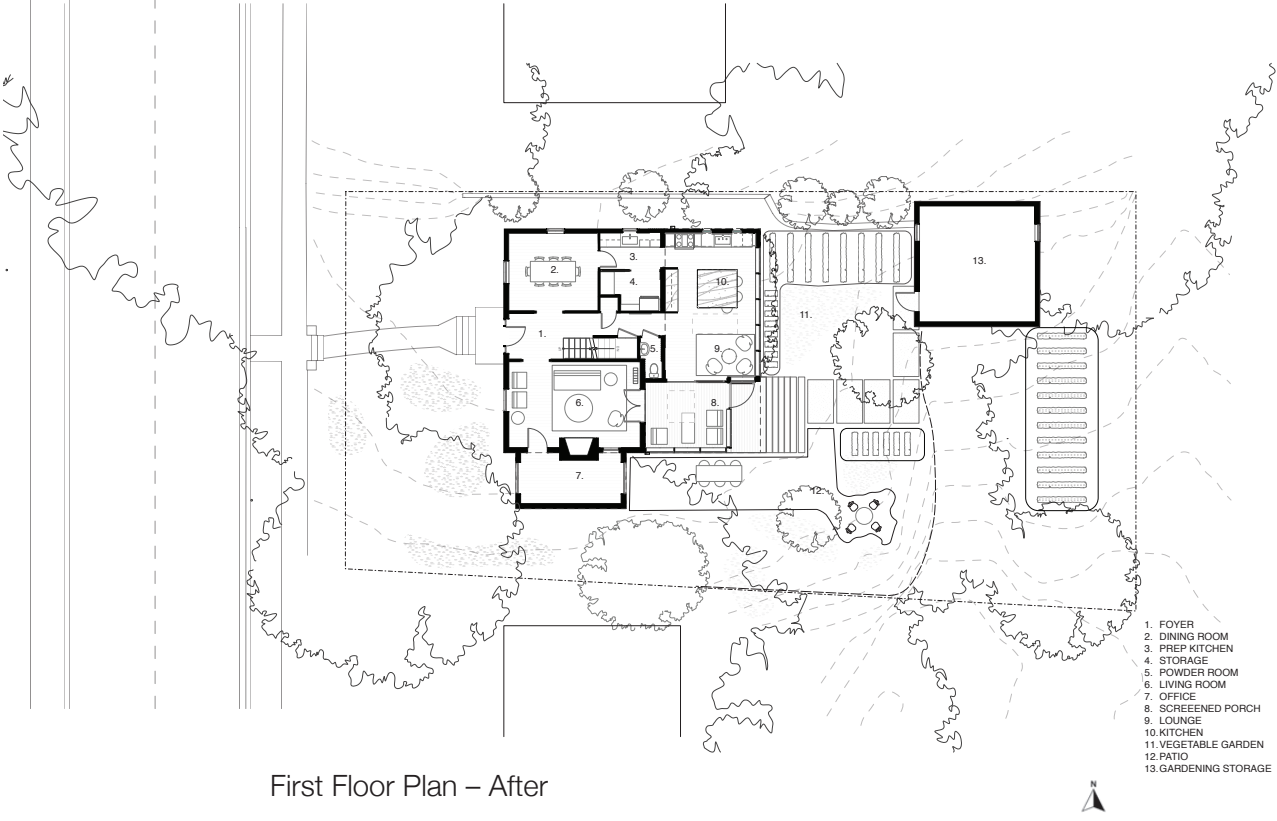




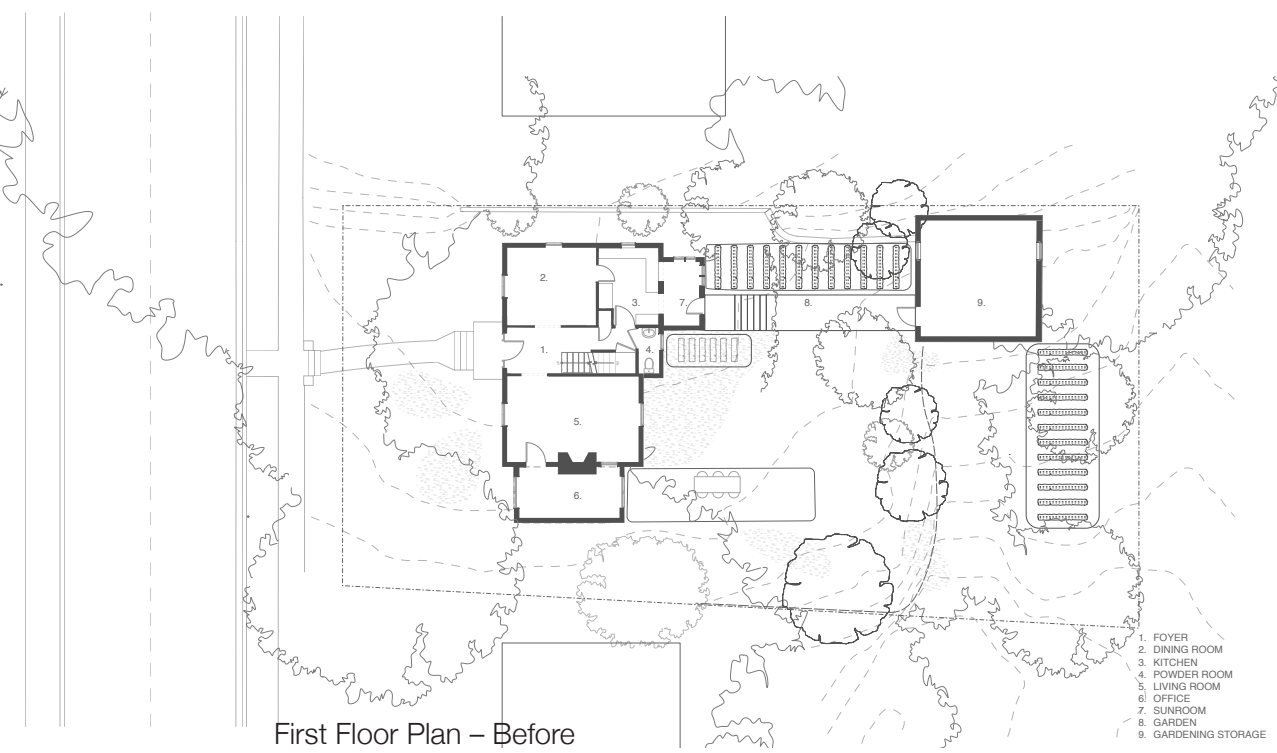
(left)
One advantage of a single-story addition is the opportunity for large skylights to balance light throughout the day and connect the homeowners to the tree canopy. In this case, we also used the skylight to help create a subtle divide between the breakfast area and the working area of the kitchen

(below)
View from garden showing the screened porch and addition. While the addition is only single story and approximately the size of the existing living room, it has had a transformative impact on the lives of its residents. The couple is able to be immersed with the food that they grow and use to cook in the new kitchen.





First Floor Plan – After



First Floor Plan – Before



(left)
 The sitting area was designed as a flexible use space. It has a modular sofa for setting up the area as a breakfast nook or a sitting area depending on the season or entertaining type. Or furniture can be moved into the living room for larger entertaining or impromptu dance parties.



(above)
Before view of the kitchen

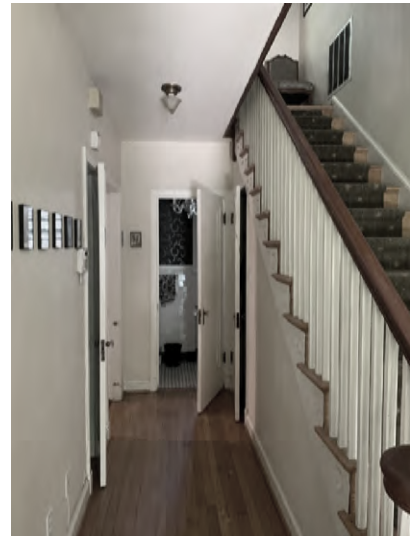


(left)
New kitchen cooktop area. Operable windows at the sink and the large slider at the screened porch allow for opening up the addition along the North-South axis.



(above)
Natural stone countertops were a high priority splurge for the homeowner. To offset that cost, we completed the cabinetry using a standard flat slab door and applied an off-the-shelf molding profile to the face. By using a standard profile in an unconventional orientation, we were able to create a custom look.

(left)
Cost-effective materials were used on the exterior. Fiber Cement panels, spaced with the windows to hit standard panels sizes, were set over a rain screen system. Fiber Cement battens align with the window mullions and are painted a dark color to contrast with the original brick.



view from front entry hall,
before (above) and after (right).



(left)

The Center Hall Colonial typology often relegates powder room to the end of the center hall as the floor plan's modular structure limits where poche can live. In this case, the first thing that we did was remove the powder room and slide it off to the side of the hall, providing instant relief to the stair hall. A new skylight and windows centered on the hall, draw the visitor into the new space. Original doors were kept and re-used and were used as a reference when designing the new kitchen cabinetry.

(below)

View of the kitchen as you enter from the screened porch door.



(below)

Sliding doors at the screened porch open to extend the interior into it. The large overhang on the Eastern side of the screened porch protects it in the morning, while the original center hall mass of the house blocks the Western light in the afternoon. The screened porch acts as a buffer for the kitchen in the middle of the day by filtering the southern light through the width of the porch. The ceiling fan in the screened porch helps circulate air into the original living room and new kitchen space.



(right)

Wide amphitheater like steps spill out of the porch and providing a terraced perch for admiring and keeping a watchful eye on the garden, a stepped display for potted plants, or a sunny spot for dog sunbathing.





In the early morning, the sun rises facing the addition. The windows are lit by the rising sun and wall of windows reflects back the garden into itself.