

DESIGN NEW ENGLAND

A renovation made this Beacon Hill brownstone as perfect as its location

DESIGN NEW ENGLAND HOME IMPROVEMENT



The outdoor dining set on this roof deck is from Allegra Classics. The table has a tempered glass surface on aluminum base. Photo by Eric Roth/Design by Renovation Planning

Jaci Conry

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Briefly, the owners of this five-story brownstone in Boston's Beacon Hill considered moving out of the city. As their two sons approached adolescence, they saw the appeal of leafy suburban neighborhoods, expansive backyards, and two-car garages.

After just a few real estate open houses, however, they realized they were most comfortable as urban dwellers. "Prior to moving to Boston, they'd lived in Manhattan for years. They are city people at heart," says Jeff Swanson, design principal of Renovation Planning in Boston. "They loved the location of their house, where they could walk to everything."

Once the homeowners decided to stay in the 1918 town house for the long haul, they reached out to Swanson to draft plans for renovations tailored to their lifestyle. The priority was the first-floor kitchen. "I bake, and my husband loves to cook," says the wife. "We like people to gather around us when we're working in the kitchen. We couldn't do that with the layout."



Although the kitchen is on the first floor, the back of the house is elevated so that the Juliet balcony, accessed through a french door, is six feet above the ground. Caesarstone countertops are from Cumar Marble and Granite in Everett, Massachusetts. A second work area is at the opposite end of the room. —Photo by Eric Roth/Design by Renovation Planning

Two large double-door refrigerators and dual dishwashers consumed much of the room. Cabinetry was minimal, and the island was too small. The table was pushed up against the bay window overlooking Charles Street, which left a vast area between it and the island. "An enormous part of the kitchen was unoccupied," says the wife. "Our sons thought it was great; they would roll around and kick balls around that space. But it was awkward." In addition, the tiny, inefficient work space was directly in the sightline of the front door, so for anyone entering the house, the mess from meal prep was often the view.

Swanson's plan called for a total remake. "The only thing in the room we left intact," he says, "was the face of the fireplace, which we converted to gas."

While the footprint remained unchanged, Swanson reconfigured the room to make it more functional. Working with contractor Thomas McHugh Custom Renovations of Roslindale, Massachusetts, he installed a large island and an ample countertop next to the cooktop to provide plenty of prep space. Two sinks and distinct work zones make it possible for husband and wife to cook concurrently. For casual family dining, Swanson designed a walnut table attached to the island at counter height. It provides seating for four and views of both the fireplace and bay window, where Swanson installed a window seat with storage for cookbooks underneath.



A wall of large-scale porcelain tile gives the master bath spa-like appeal. The LED "Cubi" wall sconces by Leucos Lighting contribute to the decidedly contemporary ambience. —Photo by Eric Roth/Design by Renovation Planning

Swanson was careful to consider the divergent aesthetic preferences of his clients. "He is much more traditional and loves the classic appeal of the old Beacon Hill architecture," says Swanson. She, on the other hand, prefers a more contemporary vibe. "My husband grew up with antiques on the Upper East Side of Manhattan," she says. "My ideal living space is a loft, not a five-story town house."

To appeal to her more modern taste, custom Shaker-style cabinetry by Metropolitan Cabinets in Norwood, Massachusetts, was painted a warm gray and the crown molding was removed. "There is a much more streamlined, clean look to the design now," says Swanson.



The original quartersawn oak flooring was carefully torn up when the kitchen was gutted. The wood was relaid and stained to blend in with the additional planks needed to accommodate the new layout. —Photo by Eric Roth/Design by Renovation Planning

A new master bathroom also appeals to the wife's design sensibilities. In fact, its aesthetic was based on her experience staying at the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago. "The bathroom we had there was so soothing it reminded me of a spa," she says. "I wanted our bathroom to have a similar serene feel, like I was being pampered and taken care of."

Located on the third floor, the master bedroom adjoined a very small bathroom. "There was also another big, long bathroom and a tiny bedroom on the floor," says Swanson. "It was a warren of rooms that you often find in these older town houses, but it doesn't work for most people today."

The small bedroom was transformed into a dressing room and closet, and the two existing bathrooms were combined to create a large master bath. With a custom floating vanity topped with white Caesarstone and neutral porcelain floors, the space exudes both peacefulness and luxury. Walls clad with gray tile and cube-shaped lights add modern flair. With both a walk-in shower and a deep Duravit soaking tub, the room is exactly what the wife envisioned.



The outdoor dining set on the roof deck is also from Allegra Classics. The table has a tempered glass surface on aluminum base. —Photo by Eric Roth/Design by Renovation Planning

Among the elements the family loved most about the house is the rooftop deck, which has an incredible view of the Charles River — making it a prime spot to take in the Fourth of July fireworks on the Esplanade. It, too, was ready for a makeover. Swanson conceived a design for an outdoor kitchen replete with a refrigerator, sink, cabinetry, and soapstone countertops. "Before, when we ate up there, we'd have to carry plates, utensils, everything up five flights of stairs," says the wife. "Now we have a place to store the stuff."

Swanson worked with Jean Brooks Landscapes of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to select plantings for containers around the deck. Bold orange Janus et Cie umbrellas that pivot in all directions are bolted to the new Trex flooring, keeping them stationary when the wind picks up. "We didn't have proper umbrellas before. Now we are able to be up on the deck at all times of the day," says the wife. "It's really become a whole new floor to the house for us. We love it."

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