



The Evolving Home

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES

Twenty-six years ago, when our oldest son Shep was born, we realized we needed more room than the tiny camp we were living in offered and so we began that age-old practice of house hunting. The curious thing—the old house we were interested in wasn't for sale. But it had stood empty for quite a while and upon contacting the owner several times, we were eventually able to purchase it when Shep was four months old.

What attracted us to a 19th century home? Several things including the summer kitchen, kitchen with fireplace, butler's pantry with built-in cupboards, radiators, separate rooms, and large windows that filled the house with natural light.

It seems the age of our boys now helps us remember changes we've made over the years. We moved into the house when Shep was nine months old, after we'd stripped all the wallpaper, resurfaced the horsehair

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plaster, painted every room, and pulled up carpets throughout that revealed beautiful pine floors. The floors needed sanding and polyurethane, and so we took on that final task before taking up residence.

Three years later when our youngest, Patrick, was one and Shep three, we renovated the kitchen by drawing up a plan that appealed to us. The contractor we hired followed it to a T.

By the time Pat was three and Shep five, we realized that the upstairs bathroom needed tender loving care as it felt like we were looking uphill each time we sat on the toilet. Turns out we were. At some point a joist had been cut to accommodate the bathroom addition. As we contemplated updating it, we decided we might as well add a third bedroom over the kitchen and summer kitchen.

Fast forward to 2017. Both boys (young men by now, but they'll always be "the boys" to us) had graduated from college and moved on to their careers when we decided to tear up the carpet in what had originally served as a dining room where we rarely ate a meal and had instead become our den. The floor was fir rather than pine and we hadn't refinished it all those years ago because we didn't have the right equipment.

The result of the dark stained wood added a much warmer ambiance to the room. And suddenly the kitchen around the corner

seemed old and dim and in need of rejuvenation. I thought changing out the appliances and a new floor and countertops would be enough. My husband, Allen, suggested that maybe it needed to be a bit larger.

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Despite our slight reservations, we contacted residential designer Jennifer Goselin of JMG Designs, Inc. in March 2018. We met with her and discussed what we thought we wanted, but for the most part we weren't sure; possibly an extension of the kitchen and summer kitchen out toward the backyard and the addition of a three-piece bathroom downstairs.

I wanted to keep the kitchen fireplace. And we needed to still have an indoor entrance to the barn. And yada, yada, yada.

At Jenn's suggestion, we did invite two contractors who could jack the house up to take a look. They came by and gave us a price, but still we hesitated. And kept Jenn dangling.

Summer came and went, and it was in the fall of 2018 that we finally agreed on the concept of the renovation. Maybe it was because we'd each silently imagined what the space could have been by summer's end and yet it was still the same old space.

On a rainy November day we sat down

at the kitchen counter with a piece of graph paper before us and discussed some possibilities for the rooms. The addition of a bathroom perplexed us because I didn't want it to extend across the entire summer kitchen in order to get natural light. And then it dawned on us that not all bathrooms have windows. With that, we came up with a skeleton plan that we thought might work and a few days later I contacted Jenn again.

As it turned out, she was booked through the middle of January, but said that would still work with our timeline of hoping to have the project completed by late summer/early fall.

In the meantime, we pulled out a spiral notebook and began to jot down ideas of what we wanted/didn't want. Want: sliding barn door between kitchen and summer kitchen; natural materials; pull-out shelves; dishwasher, perhaps a covered back porch to grill; mudroom; transom-style windows in the bathroom. Don't want: granite countertops; subway tiles. Both lists continue to grow.

In late January we met with Jenn again and shared our new ideas. Right away she got that we wanted to modernize the two rooms while maintaining the historical integrity of the house. Though we began with no specific design in mind, she stepped in with incredible patience as we rambled on.

She also understood that we have become so accustomed to the space that we couldn't necessarily see its potential. And that we are not only adjusting to what could eventually be a changing family dynamic if the boys bring home spouses and perhaps children, but also to our futures as we age and may no longer be able to climb the stairs to go to the bathroom or bedroom. For the foreseeable future, the summer kitchen will continue to serve as my office, but we'd like it to have the potential to transform easily into a downstairs bedroom should we need it.

As we delved deeper into this project, I began to understand that it's a bit like writing an article. The idea forms, research and interviews are conducted, drafts written or blueprints drawn, the editing process begins and suddenly it's a done deal.

Before we got too far, I asked to sit down with Jenn and her colleague, interior designer Melissa Ellen Downes, to find out what we or any homeowner should consider when embarking on such a project.

How long have you been doing this sort of work?

JMG: I have owned my business since 1998. Before that I worked for a company that designs banks and hospitals. It felt so impersonal because I didn't get to meet with the clients so I went off on my own and decided to focus on residential design. There is nothing more satisfying than seeing the smiles on my clients faces when I make their ideas a reality.

MED: I was in the construction field since 2006. Before that I was a seamstress for a high-end interior designer. I've been able to match all my skills into one. I think it all through and have seen both sides.

How does the process work?

JMG: The initial contact with clients is usually by phone where I ask them to email me any information they have gathered whether it be photos, sketches, or a list of things that are important to them. I then set up a time to meet with them. It is amazing by just listening and watching how I can understand what the client is looking for even if they are not sure. With a remodel, I will measure existing conditions, which look like a bunch of scribbles that only I can interpret, so I can reconstruct the existing structure on paper. The important thing is to always make the addition look like it has been there all along. Once the preliminary concept is created, it starts a conversation to move forward with revisions. We will keep

changing the plans until we get it right. Then I produce the construction plans.

MED: My part is Scope of Work, which covers everything from clearing trees to painting the last piece of trim and all the steps between. During renovation what will be saved? What will get trashed? I can help with the order of events—when to have fixtures on site to keep the project moving. I take Jenn's plan and make it priceable for a contractor.

It is extremely beneficial to hire a specialist who knows the products in the market. As designers, we provide the spec and let the contractors focus on their craft. People who haven't worked with a designer always wish later that they'd had help. So much work goes into designing space, drafting it, but then more details need to be considered—blending old floors with new floors, figuring out what works, what doesn't work. It's all so layered.

Will we see drawings of the proposed end result?

JMG: Melissa takes my drawings and creates a digital version that can more easily accommodate client changes to keep the price from adding up.

MED: The number one thing I hear is, 'I can't picture it.' [She pulls out her computer and shows me 3-D drawings of local projects.] Do you see how similar the actual



photographs are to the drawings? It helps to have a visual layout. You can look at a swatch and see if it will work.

What happens if a couple come to the project with two different ideas in mind?

JMG: I gather enough information to take the burden off the homeowner and come up with a plan. Over the course of conversations we manipulate the plan and try to get the couple to agree on the concept. We're very good at listening to both sides and incorporating their ideas in such a way that they don't realize they've been compromised.

MED: For some couples, one person cares more about a particular section of the house than the other. It's like we take black and white and blend them together. I think that comes with being good at what we do.

What might be important issues, considerations, and challenges of our project?

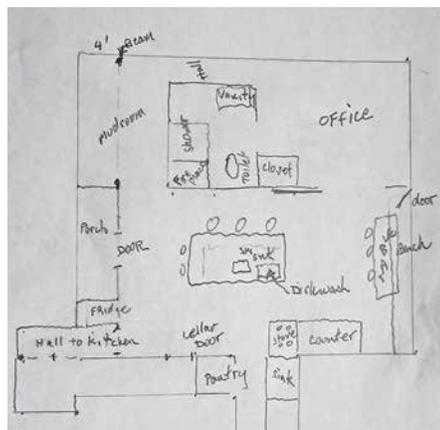
JMG: With a remodel, a lot is structural. I look at the plumbing and mechanical, trying to make sure we don't run into any issues during the construction process. Remodels can be difficult because there are unseen issues that arise all the time, like rotted wood for example. I try to get as much information on the front end to make it an easier process for the client and the contractor.

MED: I'll get pricing, but also allow for potential unforeseen items. We want this to be fun. We don't want you to be stressed.

How will you address our desire to age in place?

MED: We're doing the layout for now while thinking about the future. You might not want hand bars in the shower now, but we can place the fixtures in there for future aging in place.

JMG: We want to make sure the conversion works nicely. You're planning for the



end result, in this case a bedroom that will serve as a nice office for a while.

As the clients, what do we need to do?

JMG: Communication is key and we want to work the design around what you are looking for. We listen to what your needs are.

MED: A client hits a point where they've already committed to the job. It's a huge deal. It changes your life at that time as you go through the construction process. Like Jenn said, we need to listen to make it manageable.

Their passion was obvious as the two young women practically finished each other's sentences. Our next step was to wait a

week for Jenn to develop a couple of design options. As much as I wanted to pester her and ask how it was going, I waited patiently. And on the day she said we'd have them, they arrived via email.

My initial reaction: Yikes! But then I realized that here we are wanting change, only it's so difficult to imagine our house any other way.

Allen has his own take on things and actually drew a revised blueprint. Our next step is to meet with Jenn and begin the editing process. The Hayes house: about to evolve again. ☀

HAYES REMODEL- OPTION 2

