The home's renovation blended old and new. In the foyer, the built-in bookcase to the right is new, though it looks as if it's always been there. The new built-ins replaced a door that previously led to the kitchen.

EXTENDING CHARACTER

BY SHAWN GILLIAM • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF JOHNSON • STYLING BY LISA EVIDON

IT'S TOUGH TO TELL WHAT'S OLD AND WHAT'S NEW IN THIS 1922 MINNEAPOLIS HOME—AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT THE DESIGN TEAM INTENDED.

Gracious Georgian style helped sell Martha and Steve O'Hara on their home near Lake Harriet when they bought it 23 years ago. Part of the appeal: beautifully preserved 1920s details that are characteristic of architect Ernest Kennedy. "He was kind of a big deal in his time," says Martha, who owns Martha O'Hara Interiors, one of the Twin Cities' largest interior design firms. "My husband likes to say this might have been his high school project—it's much smaller than other projects of his, like the home he designed for the Pillsburys and other big, elegant homes from the '20s and '30s." Though smaller—this home measures just under 4,000 square feet—it had plenty of room for their family of four.

There was one notable exception, however: The rear entry had quite the icy reception. (For much of the year, literally.) Twelve slick steps, plus another 35 feet of walkway, connected the home and its detached garage. "I can't believe they hadn't broken their necks," says architect Jeff Murphy of Murphy & Co. Design. "Climbing those stairs to the kitchen every winter was pushing the limits."

So the O'Haras hired Murphy to forge a better connection: a back entry addition that brought the stairs inside. He also reduced the 35-step walkway to a more manageable 15 while maintaining plenty of space for a driveway turnaround, something Martha didn't want to give up.

Beyond that, Murphy, along with builders John, Jeff, and Gary Kraemer (John Kraemer & Sons) and Martha O'Hara interior designers Carrie Ellington and Kristy Conlin, made the space beautiful. "You can't

Martha O'Hara (lower left) is sitting in a Van Peursem swivel chair covered in a Kelly Wearstler fabric. Custom-painted wisteria wallpaper in the dining room (left) nods to Martha's southern roots (originally from Tennessee, she now spends part of the year in Austin, Texas). The Lillian August marble-top console table and Visual Comfort lamps (right) extend the elegant feel. In the living room (above), the Lincoln art on the mantel is by Cat Clausen from the Uptown Art Fair.

tell where the old and new start and stop, because we pulled a lot of the millwork details from the original design," Jeff Kraemer says. "When you walk in, it feels like an old space. It feels like you're stepping back in time."

Considering construction would already be underway, the O'Haras asked the team to tackle their second-highest priority at the same time: expanding the kitchen to create space for multiple work stations and opening it to the dining room. "My

husband is an amateur chef," Martha says. "And I'm not a sit-at-a-desk person—I love spreading blueprints out on the dining room table. So my work area opened up to his work area."

As with the new back entry, the design team incorporated period details. Conlin, for instance, noted imperfections in the kitchen and dining room's original glass windows. "She matched the cabinet glass as closely as possible to the old window glass, and your eye picks up on the imperfections right away," Martha says. "It's all in the details if you're going to honor the old architecture of a home while making as many changes as we did."

In enlarging the kitchen, the design team removed the rear staircase and old chimney stack—a move that allowed them to make better use of upstairs space. What had been four bedrooms with four tiny baths became three sizeable bedroom suites and a laundry room. "The bathrooms were a challenge because we were not making any changes to the exterior facade—everything was perfectly symmetrical," Conlin says. "So we had to be very creative with how we laid out vanities and tubs. We got it all to work, and each bedroom has an attached bath, perfect for how we live today."

When it came to furnishing the home, Ellington and Conlin were challenged to treat Martha as a client, not as the firm's owner. "We've designed so many beautiful

Marble countertops, glazed-tile backsplash walls, and white cabinetry (above) give the kitchen a fresh, classic look. The Visual Comfort lanterns (one is shown) were ordered without glass to keep the look airy. The Heidi McFall self-portrait (right) is a treasured piece on indefinite loan from a friend of Martha's. A Stewart Furniture settee in the back entry (below) is a colorful contrast with the graphic concrete tile floor.

(From left to right) The designers chose a cast-iron tub with a polished-nickel exterior surface in lieu of a built-in model. "It's like a piece of furniture," says Martha O'Hara designer Kristy Conlin. A high-gloss mixed-media piece by Rimi Yang, from the Russell Gallery in Austin, adds personality. A table lamp from Visual Comfort lends a modern touch to the more traditional bed and nightstand (both from Baker Furniture). Gold-finish drapery rods and sconces warm up the otherwise cool master bedroom. The Anne Siems art and Fay + Belle rug complement the walls, which are painted Blackened by Farrow & Ball.

homes and have had many happy clients and made many friends along the way. I wanted to have that client experience," Martha says. "So I stepped back and said, 'Surprise me.'"

Ellington, who's worked for Martha for 14 years and is the firm's design director, had a good sense of Martha's taste in art, so she was comfortable making many of those decisions. Whenever possible, she specified items from the firm's own lines, including Fay + Belle (named after Martha's maternal grandparents) rugs. The silk rug in the living room, for example, was custom-designed for the space, right down to the faux bois pattern and shades of gray.

Most rooms are painted in Benjamin Moore's White Dove (flat finish on the walls; satin on the millwork), but Ellington and Conlin did a little convincing with Martha to carry that to spaces like the living room and foyer. "I was afraid we'd lose some of the detail in the crown molding and plasterwork if we went white-on-white," Martha says. "But Kristy and Carrie recommended it, so we did it, and I love it."

Some things they didn't touch. "We didn't change the fireplace surround—the marble even has a big crack in it, and we left that," Ellington says. "It's in an old house and it's got character."

Quite a bit, though, has changed—and Martha saw it for the first time last spring, when she returned from Austin, Texas, where she and Steve have family and spend winters. "I walked into the house and it was done," she says. "It was gorgeous—it brought tears to my eyes. The ultimate reveal." ▪