What Came Before

Nostalgia for the traditional past inspires a home for a modern family.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAREN MELVIN

You can't grow up in the South and not feel nostalgic for its traditional, gracious past. So when this family of four moved to Minneapolis from North Carolina, they decided to build in a refined, established neighborhood where they could feel right at home. Savvy in their aesthetic preferences, the owners worked closely with architect Jeff Murphy of Murphy & Co. Design and project manager Nate Wissink from Streeter & Associates to create a home that expressed their love of the traditional Colonial form. "When the clients started with the vision, they wanted the house to feel like it had been there

for a hundred years, not look like new construction," says Murphy. "They wanted it to appear as if there was a main house with multiple additions over time."

The crisply white-shingled home is classic Colonial with an emphasis on balance, repetition and sigh-inducing enfilade: The majestic center hall offers a view to the rear grounds, with rooms to each side of the axis. This, more than any other architectural element, drove the design of the home. "I love the experience of walking into this entry," says the owner.

Murphy was sensitive to the repetition of form. One stunning example? The scale of the windows and interior paneling dancing a duet in the entry gallery. "Jeff has such a great eye for historically correct detailing in homes," notes Wissink. "His ability to marry interior and exterior detailing and create the overall vision for the homeowner is unique."

But the job required more than just a good architect. The building of all this detailed paneling and custom casework necessitated exacting execution. Murphy returns the appreciation: "We have a confidence in Streeter's ability and process that just makes the whole experience worry-free — and it's always so fun!"

Happily, the interpretation of the traditional elements is not reduced to the literal. While the living and dining rooms are entered through classic cased doorways, the family room and kitchen at the rear of the home are completely open and light-filled. A beautiful open stairway is accessed from the family room instead of the front hall. "Jeff asked me about the staircase in the center hall. I thought about it but said, 'No, I don't need a prom staircase,'" the homeowner says with a smile. "He wasn't sure what I meant. 'You know, the stairs where the girl comes down in her prom dress.' He got the point."

The owner eagerly tackled the interior design. "I love traditional homes, but I think they can live as modern depending on what you put inside," she says. She thought of rooms as having a personality, the living room as the "sweater" room — designed to offer comfort the way a favorite sweater does. She gave the space a more casual feel with the addition of the hide rug, a piece stolen from her husband's office.

There is a precision and thoughtfulness throughout, with furnishings that harken to the homeowners' past. Nothing is loose or casual in a haphazard way. A few antiques and meaningful pieces of art inhabit this home. The owners

AN AFFAIR WITH A HOUSE
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ANNIE LEIBOVITZ AT WORK

appreciate scale and selected lighting that grabs your attention and fills the rooms. "Nate helped me with lighting. He was amazing and has such good taste. I had strong ideas, but I made mistakes, too. These are the third set of lights here," she says, pointing to the fixture over the kitchen island. "And when it was time to hang the fixture in the upper hall and I panicked, Nate dropped everything to help me set the height with the electrician."

It is a home that announces itself quietly. It behaves itself. And the team's talents and efforts, while not without a few passionate discussions, are bound together in harmony here. It's a home where the traditional past lives like a friendly ghost — especially in a set of green shutters taken from the demolished house that is mounted in the back hall, a totem of gratitude for what came before. AL