

Hidden Potential

Two fearless architects see past a quirky floor plan and dilapidated rooms to create a welcoming home centered around a charming kitchen and dining room.





LEFT: The newly renovated kitchen is the center of Paul Fiore and David Foley's household. Removing the wall between the kitchen and dining room created a more open floor plan and space for an island. A new bank of cabinets in front of the stairway to the attic provides extra storage space. THIS PHOTO: Paul and David chose pewter and milk-glass pendants for the dining area. Throughout the project, they opted for historically "sympathetic" elements.



THIS PHOTO: When the homeowners found an old soapstone sink in a salvage yard, they built the cabinets and counters to accommodate it. Chalkboard refrigerator panels, made by spraying three coats of chalkboard paint onto 1/4-inch plywood and mounting the panels on the doors, display messages, grocery needs, and to-do lists.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Fireslate counters installed by the sink provide a relatively inexpensive alternative to granite but require more frequent applications of sealer or mineral oil to ward off stains.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Off the kitchen, a drop-down shelf on the side of the refinished staircase to the attic keeps cat bowls off the floor.



“Quirky” is how homeowners Paul Fiore and David Foley euphemistically describe the early-19th-century working-class house they discovered in an appealing Cambridge, Massachusetts, neighborhood. The ground level of the unoccupied structure was boarded up, leaving the home’s only usable entry at the top of a flight of exterior stairs. The kitchen sink was the home’s sole basin. The tub was in the attic. And in a bizarre display of questionable privacy and compromised hygiene, the only toilet—unpaired with a sink basin—was located on the stairway landing on the main level.

But Paul and David, both architects, saw promise shining through the rotten floorboards and layers of asphalt shingle siding. “It was a nice shell of a house,” Paul says.

The cottage had character, evinced in charming features, such as a concealed interior staircase, yet it was not marked by any one style. This meant the two professionals could use a variety of traditional elements in their remodeling effort without limiting themselves to a particular period—and they could toss in a few modern touches.

“We could enjoy what was appealing to us without having to retain anything that we didn’t like,” David says.

With help from Paul’s brother, general contractor Joe Fiore, the intrepid homeowners decided to do the renovation themselves and set about transforming confined utilitarian rooms into refreshing, contemporary spaces. Nowhere is this change more apparent than in the main-level central gathering areas. By converting the living space to a dining room and taking out a wall that shut off the kitchen from the new dining area, the owners created a single space that packs in plenty of function and style. It masterfully combines modern amenities and a sense of historical character. They then created a large living space from the former dining room and a bedroom.

While the owners had their share of challenges during the remodeling project, including bowed beams and a 6-inch dip in the kitchen floor, they managed to create a timeless home that maintains its past integrity while gracefully entering the present.

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