



after



# Let There Be Light

A wall of windows and a higher ceiling opened up this once dark and dreary living space **BY DAPHNE MOSHER**

**WHEN CHRIS AND STAN LUCAS MARRIED** four years ago, they saw no reason to sell the house Chris had bought with her former husband in 1996. The four-bedroom, three-bath home in a wooded Bethesda, Md. neighborhood was big enough for their new family of four; the excellent school system suited Chris' two teenage children fine. The only problem was that the 1950s ranch was sorely in need of updating. High on the couple's wish list was to make their living and dining area lighter and to replace the drafty windows that faced the backyard pond, waterfall and stately 80-year-old oaks and poplars. So as part of a far-reaching renovation that included a new kitchen and floors and electrical work, the Lucases replaced the living room windows with energy-efficient double-paned ones filled with argon. They added a 7½-foot-wide window paired with two low awning windows to a back wall of the dining area, creating an impressive 18-foot-wide bank of glass overlooking the yard. Glass doors leading to a new porch took the place of the old dining room windows. Total window and door cost: \$12,918. "Since our renovations, we've weathered 60-mph winds, hail, driving rain and snow," says Chris, "and our utility bills are lower." **\$**



before

**Dodge the draft** Another problem with the 1959 floor-to-ceiling windows was leaks. "The heavy curtains that we needed to block drafts made our living and dining room dark and dreary at times," says Chris.

## THE NUMBERS

BOUGHT IN 1996 FOR  
**\$290k**

RENOVATION COSTS  
**\$245k**

MARKET VALUE TODAY  
**\$800k**

www.reinhardt-architect.com (Before)

**Through the roof** The old eight-foot-high gypsum-board ceiling made the rooms feel closed in. Fortunately the Lucases didn't need to raise the roof, because they had five feet of unused attic space above the living and dining area. Their new ceiling follows the lines of the roof, culminating in a pair of skylights that face east and west for maximum natural light all day. Total cost: \$14,300.

**WHERE DID IT GO?** The windows, ceiling and skylights ate up roughly 10% of the total construction budget but produced the most dramatic changes to the house. "It was well worth the wait and cost," says Chris. Local realtor Mary Balaw agrees, adding that "even in today's soft market, Chris and Stan could easily get \$800,000 for their house."

## DOS & DON'TS by Duo Dickinson

### » Adding Light

**DO** Go with skylights that open. They're better venting than windows. Extra cost: \$200 each, or \$700 for mechanized ones.

**DON'T** Scatter skylights randomly; integrate them with the roof's shape for a better look and fewer leaks.

**DO** Install big fixed windows on the walls that face your best views.

**DON'T** Neglect to add small windows that open above or below fixed glass.

**DO** Put windows high on the wall for the best venting and light throughout the room.

**DON'T** Forget that trickier installation hikes the cost of putting windows tight to the ceiling (\$400 each).

**DO** Group several windows together; you'll save on construction costs and have a less obstructed view.

**DON'T** Separate windows with fat supports that ruin your view and run you another \$200 per opening.

**DO** Keep interior fabrics from fading by installing shades in windows facing east, west or south; built-ins are \$100 and up.

**DON'T** Use UV-inhibiting coating, especially near noncoated windows; it gives your glass a tinted or reflective look.

Contributing writer Duo Dickinson is an architect in Madison, Conn.