

Bungalow Bump Out

More room for the '90s, while retaining a '20s charm

M

oving from a cramped one-bedroom apartment in 1988, Michael and Margriet Finnegan reveled in the stuccoed 1925 bungalow they found on a quiet street in Cos Cob, Connecticut. They loved its broad front porch and cozy rooms, as well as the fieldstone wall surrounding the deep backyard. But after 10 years, the two-bedroom house's 1,200 square feet began squeezing them tighter than a bad pair of shoes. There were barely any built-in closets, and Margriet—

Architect Duo Dickinson grafted a dramatic addition onto the back of Margriet and Michael Finnegan's bungalow, which increased their living space by 70 percent. The master bedroom and bath are upstairs. Downstairs, in the family room and expanded kitchen, they now enjoy a view of their backyard through a triptych of 8-foot-high windows.

who manages a women's clothing store—had to keep her prodigious wardrobe in the basement. The tiny bathroom made it difficult for them to get ready for work at the same time, and in the kitchen they were jammed elbow to elbow washing and drying dishes at the enameled iron sink. "We were squished," says Michael, a printing salesman. "We couldn't afford to move up, and we also loved this place. We decided it would be better for us to stay and add on."

The first architects the Finnegans talked to proposed building boxy ells with decks in the back—just like the ones on many neighboring

houses. "But I wanted something with some personality," says Michael, and Margriet wanted something that made the most of their beautiful yard. Eventually they found architect Duo Dickinson of Madison, Connecticut—and an affordable solution to their dilemma. Dickinson sketched an imaginative 800-square-foot addition to the back of the house that would give them a new master bedroom and bath, a larger kitchen, and new family room (see "Whimsy on a Budget," p. 55). "It would have been easier to just tear the house down, or add something huge that would stick its tongue out at the original," says Dickinson. "But I thought this was the sweetest little house; I wanted to preserve that feeling."

He didn't feel as kindly toward the floor plan, a classic four-square with small rooms clustered around a center stairwell. This layout had locked the Finnegans into an antiquated Ozzie-and-Harriet way of life, where every room had a separate function. When they entertained, for instance, it was, "sit down in the living room, eat in the dining room, then wave good-bye," says Dickinson.

At first, he fit the new rooms in a curved addition, but the cost was at odds with the Finnegans' budget. Instead, they agreed on a trapezoidal footprint, partly because the shape looked nice ("Duo's never met an angle he didn't like," jokes Michael), and partly because it would let them sneak the car

After



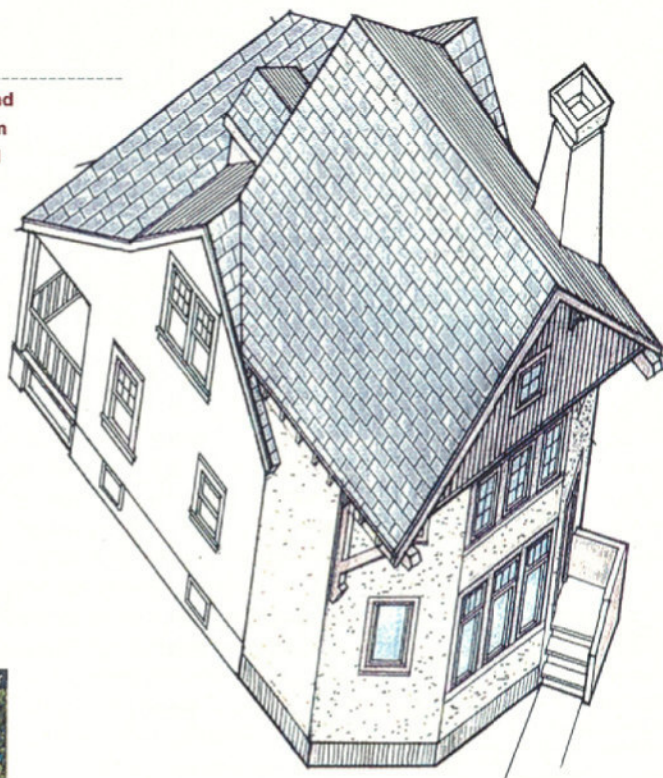
Before



BY CURTIS RIST

WHIMSY ON A BUDGET

Michael and Margriet Finnegan had one thing clearly in mind when they expanded their house: "We wanted a family room that stepped down from the rest of the house, and that had windows looking out the back," says Margriet. The two-story addition Duo Dickinson designed for their house gave them just that—complete with a fireplace and a soaring 11-foot ceiling. They also got a new bedroom, a large walk-in closet, an upstairs bath, and a larger kitchen downstairs. By specifying stock cabinets and laminate countertops, Dickinson was able to give them what they needed—more space—at a price they could afford. "The design always came back to the budget," Dickinson says. That didn't stop him from indulging in some architectural whimsy: note the tapered chimney poking out of the roof and the giant brackets supporting the eaves.



From the street, the only sign of Dickinson's two-story addition is a gable peeking over the original roof line. "We kept all the front elements the same," he says. "That way, the house still fits into the neighborhood."



past the house and into the garage out back.

While designing the addition went smoothly, the task of building it didn't. The Finnegans hired a contractor recommended by Dickinson, and not long after the back roof was ripped off to begin the framing. Margriet went to stay with her mother, but Michael insisted on staying put, to keep an eye on construction. "He slept on a daybed in the dining room, with his suits on a curtain rod, and the wind howling through," says Margriet.

In retrospect, it's a good thing he did: Midway through construction, he noticed fewer and fewer workers showing up. Construction ground to a halt as the contractor went broke. Rather than get bogged down in a long and costly court battle, Michael jumped into action and made himself contractor. "I went to town hall, put my name on the permits, and that was it," he says. Although he had no experience in construction, with the help of Dickinson and Tim Peterson, the lead carpenter for the original contractor, Michael managed to complete the project only three months behind schedule.

As it was, the Finnegans spent around \$135,000 on their addition, about \$20,000 more than they had originally planned due to their contractor's untimely bankruptcy. But rather than feeling embittered, they calculate their happiness using a different ledger. They still have the pretty little house they've always loved, only now it has air-conditioning, two bathrooms, three bedrooms, a fireplace, a kitchen that's doubled in size, and a dishwasher, "our first in 10 years," says Margriet happily. Gone are the days of cramped closets—the Finnegans actually get dressed in the same room—and of old-fashioned formality. Now both living room and kitchen flow into the spacious new family room, inviting people to congregate, socialize, and enjoy the backyard. "They can have a bunch of people over in the evenings and sit around, watch TV, eat and talk anywhere and everywhere," says Dickinson. "It's a relaxed, '90s way of living." ■