

**R**emodeling your house is like getting fitted for a suit of clothes. Only a skilled tailor can make a suit fit you to a T, and only an experienced architect or architectural designer can create exactly the kind of space you're after. How do you find the right designer for your project, and what do you gain by working with a pro? Here are pointers from Connecticut architect Duo Dickinson, who recently helped Daniel and Lyn Gauthier add a two-story family room/kitchen wing to their 1830s-vintage farmhouse.

**A** good architect is a good listener. No amount of creative genius will get you the results you're after if the designer isn't tuned to your wavelength when you're explaining what you have in mind for your project. To Dickinson, success depends less on the quality of the design product than on the quality of the design process. "Getting a quality fit between the house and the housed," says Dickinson, "requires time, trust, and communication." Architects and their clients usually are total strangers when they begin working together. To open up the

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lines of communication, Dickinson starts the design process with open-ended preliminary drawings that prompt his clients to loosen up and react. This gives him a chance to learn more about them before narrowing in to a specific design concept.

**G**ood design should feel good—to you as well as to your architect. Some architects get carried away by their passion for artistic expression, forgetting that what you really want is a home that's warm, friendly, and livable. Home remo-

# REMODELING — WITH AN — ARCHITECT

Duo Dickinson



THE ARCHITECT

BY WILLIAM L. NOLAN

delings tend to be time-intensive and require dealing with the clients' tastes, habits, and personal quirks. Most architects specialize in commercial or institutional design projects. Those who choose remodelings as their specialty are more likely to do a good job on that type of design because houses are their first love. "Designing living spaces is not a stepping-stone for me—it's what I care about," says Dickinson.

He likens a well-designed home to poetry or music. "It resonates with meaning," he says, "even when you can't quite explain its meaning in so



The Gauthiers

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## REMODELING WITH AN ARCHITECT

many words. More than any other type of building, the intimate sensibilities of a home call for a depth of detail and material expression. Like fresh bread or spring water, a home can be both familiar and exhilarating."

**G**aining a good fit is doubly challenging when you're adding new space to old. To avoid what Dickinson calls a *collision* between old and new, your designer has to be a time traveler, equally at home with the architecture of the past and that of today.

After lovingly restoring their 1830s-vintage farmhouse, Dan and Lyn Gauthier discovered they needed more room for their growing family. They asked Dickinson to create an addition that would nearly double the home's square footage without changing its character. Their wish list included a bigger family room and kitchen, a new master bedroom and bath, and a second staircase to the upper level. Dickinson's advice to the Gauthiers: "Keep

An island work area merges the kitchen with the family room. Pillars flank the island, adding a graceful transition between the two spaces.



Glass-front cupboards in the kitchen and French doors in the family room reinforce the addition's period flavor. Half-windows below the cupboards not extra light near the sink.

the existing mass pristine, and use its materials and colors for the new mass." He designed a separate two-story wing and linked it to the original structure with a new front entry. On the exterior, he borrowed the original roof pitch, window proportions, and trim, but "reinterpreted" them by mixing in other elements. The result is what Dickinson calls "invigorated federal." The Gauthiers are delighted with their new spaces. "We're almost always in the new end now," says Lyn.

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THE KITCHEN



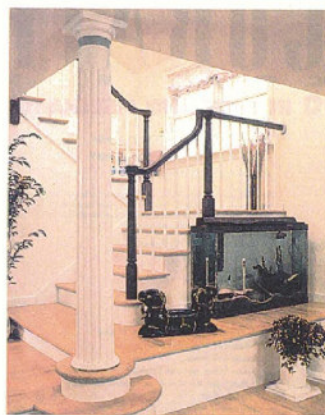
## REMODELING WITH AN ARCHITECT

"I particularly enjoy being able to make dinner with the children right there."

**W**hen you hire a pro, you're likely to discover and appreciate pleasant little surprises after the new spaces take shape. Good designers often add refinements you hadn't thought of, such as a deft manipulation of light, a comfortable sense of scale, or clever trim details that seem to make the room. Here, for example, bands of subtle color put a contemporary spin on the columns' Doric capitals, and one column rests on half-round sections of flooring that form a stair-stepped base. The spirit is unmistakably traditional, yet the treatment is anything but stuffy.

**E**very architect operates differently, but good communication is the key to a successful remodeling. Dickinson begins by asking for a list of everything the client wants, from most to least important. Next, he asks the client to go through magazines and select pictures they like. "That gives me a real sense of their preferences," he says. In the case of the Gauthiers, their selections told him they liked Palladian windows and columns.

Once the project gets rolling, it involves almost daily interchanges among the builder, homeowners, and

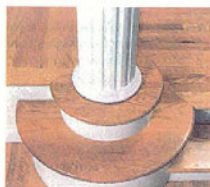


A stairwell in one corner of the addition links the family room with the master suite. Treads and flooring are red oak; the banisters are clear pine.

THE FAMILY

for exploratory consultation with prospective clients.

Architects usually offer a wide range of services, but certain kinds may not be included because the architect isn't licensed in those areas of expertise. For example, Dickinson doesn't do surveying, soil analysis, cost estimating, or landscape design, but he will help obtain these services from qualified sources. Like most architects, he doesn't serve as the purchasing agent for the project; it's up to you to place orders and make payments for materials. Types of services vary considerably from one architect to another, so you'll want to discuss this aspect thoroughly with each architect you interview before deciding which one to hire.



Semicircular risers in the stairwell form a playfully casual base for the corner column, giving old forms a new spin in the added spaces.

Doric columns in the new spaces sport bands of subtle color under their capitals, lending 1990s liveliness to the addition's classic federalist architecture.

