

stewards of home

In Milwaukee, a striking limestone Tudor retains its history as it gains luxury and function through a deft renovation.

By Peter B. Thomsen / Photos by Ryan Hainey Photography

PAST & FUTURE



tHE ROUTINES and expectations of our daily lives bear little resemblance to those of the 19th century. Yet we who celebrate historic homes ask these buildings to honor both eras. Every old house holds the functional and aesthetic choices, whether well considered or unfortunate, made by each family who passed through.

Architecture is a unique discipline in its task of bridging past to present and future. The architect's role is to identify whatever harmonies and tensions exist, amplifying or resolving them, respectively. The architect (or knowledgeable owner) guides the building through time, maintaining its relevance while honoring its past.



**EXQUISITE
CRAFTSMANSHIP**

The view to the family room is a beautiful snapshot toward the hearth. The mahogany woodwork has Tudor-Gothic and Renaissance elements. Most of it is original; replicated areas are impossible to detect.

The view from the dining room looks past the entry hall and into the family room. Woodwork is original.
OPPOSITE The 1890s limestone house in Milwaukee is rendered in a formal Tudor-Gothic style.



LEFT (top) Lighting includes fanciful period-inspired fixtures [shown: Schonbek 5633]. • (below) Original Tudor-Gothic hardware remains in the house.

BOTTOM The double-action door to the kitchen is flanked by one existing built-in cabinet and, on the right, its reproduction twin.

OPPOSITE (top) Atop the garage, a new outdoor roof terrace functions as a private backyard with a green roof, a grilling zone, and dining and seating areas.

• (bottom) A smoked-glass mirror behind the bar completes the speakeasy charm. [Yoke Mini Pendant: Visual Comfort, visualcomfort.com]



SEAMLESS REPLICATION

In the baronial yet cozy family room, precious original woodwork was conserved and carefully replicated as needed. The fireplace needed to be rebuilt. Tile is from Walker Zanger (walkerzanger.com).



Houses pass not only from owner to owner but, often, from architect to architect. For two decades and across three different owners, just one firm has been acting as steward to this stone Tudor in the dense historic district of Milwaukee. The most recent renovation deftly brought modern luxury to a house that retains historic character.

Nicholas Blavat, principal of Deep River Partners, calls himself a “modern livable architect.” When the owners approached him in 2009 looking to update this 1890s Victorian limestone,



it was immediately clear that the kitchen would be the first project. The existing kitchen, more-or-less original to the house, was inefficient. A bare-bones walk-in pantry divided it. It could not be the central space we expect today.

The new layout created a spacious and semi-professional kitchen with gleaming white cabinets. Historical details have been integrated seamlessly into what is undeniably a modern kitchen. Upper cabinets (a concept which simply didn't exist in the 1890s) are held on large brackets that visually tie them to the base cabinets, giving the impression of a hutch-style construction yet with all the functionality of a modern countertop work surface. Bin pulls on the drawers are finished in lacquered bronze that match the range hood. The ceiling coffers are a successful blend of old and new with a textured covering, its depth revealed by subtle LED strip lighting.

From the kitchen, a double-

action door opens to the dining room—where we see how easily Blavat and team swap their remodeling hats for restoration chapeaus. Tall, built-in glass cabinets flank that kitchen door; the one on the left is original, its mate on the right a perfect reproduction. Woodwork is a mix of old and new, all of it refinished for a seamless match.

The view from entry hall to family room is a beautiful snapshot toward the hearth: a rebuilt fireplace enhanced by bold tile. The woodwork is exquisite and again it's impossible to tell the old from the new.

The basement is space reclaimed in a showstopping conversion that reflects the city's beer-baron heritage and the owners' ties to the microbrew industry.

Nestled within the gritty arches of structural Cream City brick, a fully outfitted speakeasy has a bar with glass-washing





**A FITTING
NEW KITCHEN**

In what is clearly a modern space, historical materials and details have been integrated seamlessly. Large brackets suggest hutchlike construction. Bin pulls and range hood have a lacquered-bronze finish.



LEFT Unlike the rest of the project, the kitchen required a fresh start to meet modern standards.

ABOVE A built-in bench creates a breakfast nook in one corner of the kitchen space.

TOP LEFT & CENTER Leaded glass, sculpted wood brackets, and bronze-finish bin pulls are historical references in fresh cabinetry.

sources ARCHITECTURE/INTERIOR DESIGN Nicholas Blavat, Richard Sherer, Natalie Erickson: Deep River Partners, Milwaukee, WI: deep-river.com • CABINETS Bliffert's Fillinger Millwork, Milwaukee: doitbest.com • RANGE HOOD Texas Lightsmith texaslightsmith.com • BIN PULLS Top Knobs Décor topknobsdecor.com



stations and beer taps. The bar is directly adjacent to a media center on one side, while an exercise room and full bath were built opposite. Here again, the original masonry arches define the layout, with side-by-side bays separating the water closet from the shower, which is at home, tiled into the brick threshold.

Modern building science aided the transformation. “It was scary down there; think horror films and spiders,” says Blavat of the original lower level. It took extensive structural and drainage engineering to create a habitable space. The unavoidably low ceilings were mitigated by clever ductwork and a light, airy paint color. The result is a cozy recreational suite that rivals the upstairs kitchen as the home’s entertaining hub.

“I’ve been remodeling this house for 20 years and for three different owners,” says Nicholas Blavat, “and I hope that in the 2120s it will still be celebrated.”

PRODUCED BY PATRICIA POORE

TOP (left) In the “speakeasy” basement, a shower stall is tiled into original, structural brick arches. • (right) Brick arches are reflected in the mirror over a furniture-quality sink vanity.

RIGHT As part of the recent renovation, a new rear hall allowed for a mudroom.

