



Celebrating THE American Home



50 Great Houses from 50 American Architects

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Townhouse Transformation

WHY THIS HOUSE

In this beautifully recycled home, Morgante-Wilson's varied column treatments highlight the role of history both playfully and effectively.

JOHN CONNELL

INTERIOR WALLS WERE REPLACED with a steel structure, which greatly increased the amount of light and the depth of field. Yet these same beams and columns serve to separate the dining space from the living space. Colors are kept neutral to maintain serenity.



Stately and solid,

the streetside façade of this Chicago townhouse offers no hint of its contemporary, sunshot interior, now completely transformed to make it more livable for a young family. Built in the 1880s as two apartments and later split into three, the house fills most of the 25-ft.-wide lot, so interiors were dimly lit by just front and rear windows. Yet the owners wanted to double the size by making a three-story addition in the rear, with the potential of further limiting access to daylight.

But adversity became the mother of invention: The architects recommended gutting the house except for the front and side walls and rebuilding the interior with a steel structure to allow for fewer walls and more light. A critical element of the design was to open the roof to make a large skylight over a new central stairway.

This big switchback stairway has become the focus of the renovated house, and it acts as an atrium that guides both traffic and light. Now spaces flow into each other to dramatically increase

Details, finishes, and furniture contrast, but gently.



IN CONTRAST TO THE FORMAL, BRICK-AND-SANDSTONE FACE of this Chicago townhouse, the back of the building breaks loose with a medley of traditional materials in an untraditional composition.



THE KITCHEN IS THREE STEPS UP from the breakfast room and family room, but a pass-through provides an easy way to get food to the table.

Architect:
Morgante-Wilson Architects
Location:
Chicago, Illinois

TO VISUALLY LIGHTEN THE UPPER CABINETS that face the breakfast room, doors are glazed and an open grid of shelving makes an airy, transparent buffer. The floor adds a subtle punch to the space with its contrasting panels of light, zebra-striped hardwood, and wider, dark-stained wood.



AS PART OF THE NEW ADDITION TO THE HOUSE, the master bedroom enjoys the luxury of a variety of ceiling heights. Splitting the chimney flues, which makes a bold statement on the rear façade of the house, allows room for a small but cheery window above the mantel.

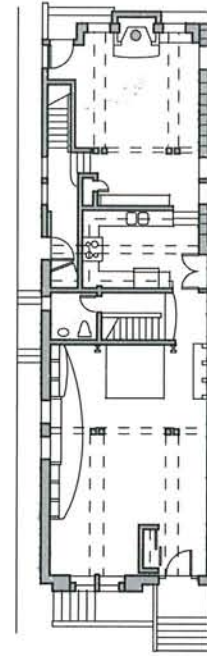


THE SUBTLE BUT EXCITING CONTRAST of geometry, color, and texture continues outside the townhouse, with a collage of lattice, brick, siding, fencing, and stone. Greenery softens the space, turning it into a peaceful oasis in the city.

FIRST FLOOR

light and livability for a growing family, yet individual rooms are kept distinct and at a comfortable scale by the orderly layout of exposed, white-painted steel beams and Victorian-style steel columns.

Hand in hand with the use of light and space, attention to detail is key to why this house delights. Details, finishes, and furniture were selected to contrast, but gently. Structural elements, which could look stolid, become light and graceful with the addition of white paint. Horizontal surfaces from floor to countertops and ascending linear elements such as stair rails are dark, which adds elegance, vigor, and drama. Contrasting or not, colors are kept neutral, allowing the most important elements in the house—the family—to add personal touches and to enjoy the light and space that make the house so easy to live in.



THIS THREE-STORY SWITCHBACK STAIR is the soul of the renovated townhouse. By way of a large skylight and clerestory windows on each floor, the stairway brings light to all interior spaces during the day, and recessed and decorative lighting add drama and brilliance by night. The dark-stained wood handrail and copper-tubing railing below give energy and direction to the light stairway.