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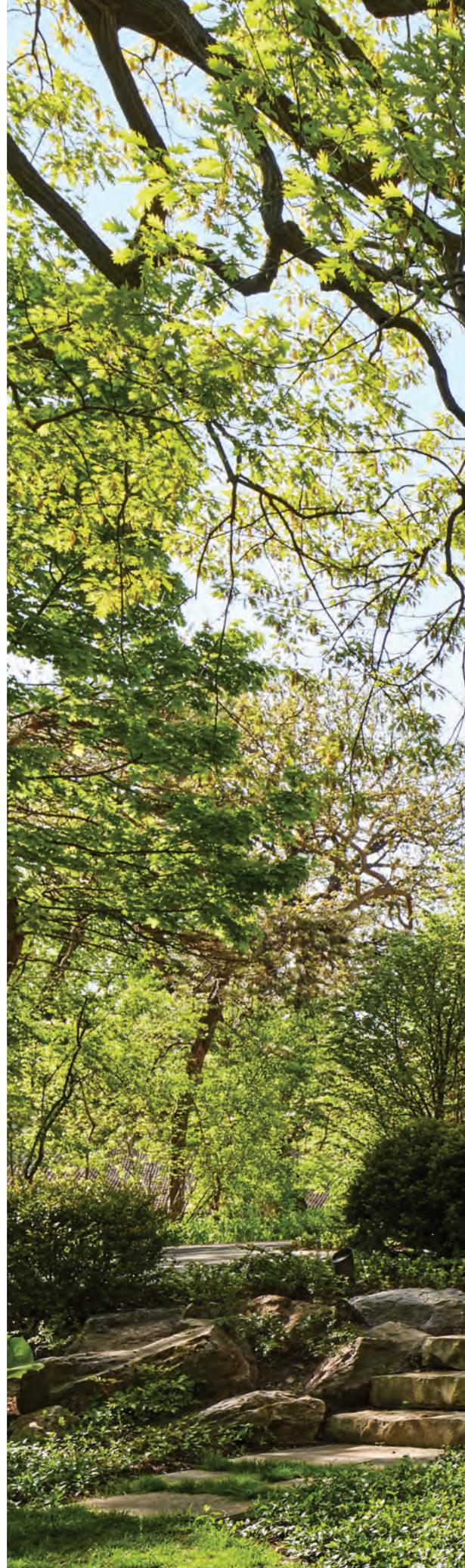
FROM THE INSIDE OUT



Silver Lining

After a fire consumes their home, a Winnetka family rebuilds bigger and better.

BY TATE GUNNERSON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY WERNER STRAUBE PHOTOGRAPHY





The new home, which boasts a large addition, sits proudly in its garden-like yard. Though the original windows weren't salvageable, the architects worked with Pella Windows to create new, larger versions that brought their Victorian look back to life. Opposite: Exposed cedar ceiling beams add a handsome touch to the new family room over the garage.

Distinguished by its lofted bead board ceiling, high cupola, and wide cedar floor planks, the screened-in porch features floor-to-ceiling views of the outdoors.



IT ONLY TAKES a few minutes for everything to change. That's what a Winnetka family learned when their vintage Tudor Victorian home of only several weeks was consumed by a raging fire on an otherwise ordinary Saturday morning. Thick black smoke filled the interior, and loud popping sounds came from inside the walls. When the wife and mother of four (ages 12 to 19) ran out the front door, a bedroom window exploded.

"That was when I really started to freak out, because I didn't know where my girls were," she says. Fortunately, they had already escaped. As firemen fought the blaze, dozens of friends and neighbors gathered on the front lawn, many of them armed with food and other essentials. In the end, the family lost 85 percent of their possessions, including a melted laptop full of family photos—all because of a faulty toaster.

"From the kitchen, you could see down into the basement and up into my son's room on the second floor," the wife says. "Had the fire been at night, it might have been a different story."

While the event was devastating, it gave the couple an opportunity to rebuild with a more open, light-filled floor plan. For help, the couple turned to Morgante Wilson Architects. "From the very beginning, I knew that was who we needed to work with," the wife recalls of an early consultation with the firm's co-principal, Fred Wilson, noting that it was his gregarious nature that sealed the deal. "We were standing inside the burned-out house, and he actually had me laughing!"

Over the months that followed, the fire-ravaged home was brought back to life, its footprint expanded with a large new addition that connects to the original structure by a light-filled stairwell that looks out into the backyard. Inside, "there was almost nothing to save, so it's all new furniture," explains Morgante Wilson co-principal Elissa Morgante, who handled the interiors with the help of colleagues K. Tyler and Danielle Wyatt. "The owners really embraced the fun part of the process."



The new staircase connects the original part of the home with the new section and also acts as an entry point. "There's a lot of circulation there," Elissa Morgante says.



A spacious banquette offers ample—and comfortable—seating in the kitchen's breakfast nook.



In the formal living room, a pair of sofas covered in lush midnight blue velvet define the main seating area in front of one of the original fireplaces. Flanked by windows dressed in barely-there treatments that let light fill the room, it's an ideal spot for entertaining. Guests can enjoy the sound of the baby grand piano on the other side of the room, where a pair of built-in bookshelves are lined with a wood wall covering from Maya Romanoff, a Skokie-based company known for its artistic work. "It makes it more special," Morgante says. "In this house, it's all about symmetry and classicism."

Hand-painted panels add a bespoke touch to the formal dining room, which is furnished with an oval wooden table surrounded by skirted chairs that speak a more contemporary dialect. In the corridor, a mirrored arabesque tile backsplash likewise elevates the look of the black bar cabinetry. But it's not all pinkies-up—this is a home for four kids, after all. A new family room over the garage boasts a wood beam ceiling and comfy sofas made for after school sprawling. In the kitchen, a cerused oak island with a unique wood and iron cross-brace offers seating for

Above: A unique wood wall covering adds a touch of elegance to the built-in shelving surrounding the window in the living room. Right: The open space is light, bright, and airy.





Above: A console table made of wood with painted panels adds a contemporary touch to the formal dining room, where the skirted seats provide the fabric in lieu of a rug. **Right:** Mirrored arabesque tile adds a special character to the black bar cabinetry between the dining room and kitchen.



on-the-go breakfasts and snacking. “We really spent time creating special moments so their house isn’t like everyone else’s,” Morgante says. “Out of all the misery of the fire, they got a spectacular home that really meets their needs.”

Unlike in the original structure, which the wife describes as a “rabbit warren of rooms,” the newly reconfigured layouts are large, light-filled and comfortable. And while it’s not uncommon for every one of the four children to have several friends over at once, space has never been an issue. “Fred and Elissa are so talented and fun, and the house that they created is perfect for us,” the wife says.

But that’s not the only happy ending to this story: After weeks of effort, a tech expert-turned-hero was able to recover every gig of data, including all the digital photos, from the melted laptop. They also received many old photos, cards and other items from friends. “Sometimes you give help, and sometimes you need to accept it,” the wife says. “That’s what we did, and we’re so blessed.”



A wood and iron cross-brace detail is one of the bespoke touches in the brand-new custom kitchen. The island countertop is quartzite, and the perimeter counter is Absolute Black granite.

FIRE SAFETY 101

This family's story didn't end in tragedy, but many others aren't so lucky. In fact, seven people are killed and 36 injured in house fires every day, says American Red Cross spokesperson Holly Baker, noting that the organization responds to 64,000 disasters every year, and residential fires account for the majority. However, there are a number of steps that people can take to prevent fires—and to improve their chances by 50 percent if one does break out. Here, Baker shares four life-saving strategies every family should adopt.

SOUND THE ALARMS

The Red Cross recommends placing a smoke alarm in every room, including bedrooms. Monthly testing is a must, and the batteries should be swapped out twice per year. To make it easy, Baker suggests doing it every time you change the clocks, whether the batteries need to be replaced or not.

MAKE A PLAN—AND PRACTICE IT

According to the Red Cross, most people have two minutes or less to escape a house fire, so making an escape plan is crucial. Choose two ways—usually a door and a window—to exit each room in the house, and pick a meeting spot a safe distance from home. Make sure everybody knows the plan, and practice twice every year.

WHEN YOU GO OUT, BLOW OUT

Candles add a beautiful ambience, but flammable items should be kept at least three feet away from any flames, and flames should never, ever be left burning unattended. The rule also applies to space heaters and any other heat source, which should also be turned off when you exit.

STOP, DROP, AND ROLL

If your clothes should ignite during a fire, remember what you learned during all those childhood fire drills: stop, drop and roll (and try not to panic). “The basic things that we learn about in school can really make a huge difference,” Baker says.