

PAST AND PRESENT

Perfect

RESPECT FOR A FORMER
1915 IRVINGTON SHOWCASE
HOUSE MARRIES HISTORY
WITH MODERN SENSIBILITIES.

By Donna Pizzi
Photography by Blackstone Edge Studios

Frank Lloyd Wright had been building modern Prairie-style homes since 1909, but there was nothing modern about the 1915 home David Schriber and Nikki Neuberger bought in an Portland's Irvington neighborhood in 2015. Built by H.E. Stimler as a spec house to show off its features – ornate plaster cornices, butler bell, silver-candelabra chandelier and sconces – the home had much wear and tear when the couple took it on.

"This home was not abused or badly remodeled, just lived in," David said.

Although the home reminded Nikki of her time spent as a young woman working concession stands at the NW Natural Street of Dreams, for which her uncle Don was director of promotions, she admits she didn't share David's creative vision for a home that would both meet their family's needs and have room for the 40-plus guests the couple hosts at the holidays.

"He encouraged me to look past the wear and tear to the bones - the original woodwork, floor plan, pocket doors and built-ins," Nikki said.

The couple would not be the only possible buyers – the home had three or four competitive offers before the sellers chose theirs – but they would eventually take on a project that would restore the home as a showpiece of its neighborhood while accomplishing something truly grand: embodying that sweet spot between historic and modern style.

"It was David's letter [that finally won them over], explaining how much we've loved being part of the Irvington community, that we're dog lovers like them and, most importantly, [that we] had no intentions of gutting the home," Nikki said.

Schriber's exhaustive search for local restoration companies led him to Arciform, LLC and then-senior designer Chelly Wentworth, who suggested clever ways to use original materials to repair broken pieces or find replicas to make things look authentic.

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respects old houses and was willing to be collaborative.”

The first iteration Lord presented occurred before she had met Neuberger and didn't show enough of her sensibility. They soon began discussing ideas and working with a shared Pinterest board. Lord got a better idea of Neuberger's style, which enabled her and her assistant, Kim Hodgkin to create a final hybrid of styles that pleased them both.

For the library, Lord wanted to infuse a sense of playfulness that would also honor the historical cornices, fireplace and quarter-sawn oak wainscoting. The whimsy began on the restored mantel where artist Steve Payne's digitized portraits of 19th-century Russian generals (their heads have been replaced by celebrities like Bill Murray) are seen in ridiculously ornate frames chosen by Neuberger and Schriber.

Thrilled by the library's built-in secretary, Schriber pulled out what he thought was the file drawer one night and found something quite different.

"I just kept pulling and pulling, and suddenly I saw the brass foot of a bed! It wasn't a file cabinet but a bed with wooden wheels, and its cast-iron frame had the maker's name on it," Schriber said.

"The bed was an amazing find," Schoeffel said. "We were able to adjust by reattaching certain parts to make it flow in and out again."



Schriber and Neuberger with their dogs Thom and Boston.

"David had clearly done his homework," Wentworth said. "He was a great, knowledgeable partner."

Adam Schoeffel, Arciform project manager, who oversaw the two-year-long restoration of the home with James Whittaker, site/carpenter lead, noted that Schriber was the engine that drove the project.

"I appreciated his dedication to preserving the home while incorporating their eclectic tastes," Schoeffel said.

Indeed, the couple's inherently divergent tastes were going to be one of the biggest challenges. Neuberger is a minimalist who loves things modern and colorful, while Schriber describes himself as a hoarder who loves antiques, history and clutter. Wentworth found the balance between the two during the first year of restoration, then passed the mantle to Arlene Lord of Lord Interior Design, whom Wentworth recommended to the couple for the furnishings.

"Chelly Wentworth understood that Nikki and I are very hands-on," Schriber said. "We're not designers or architects, but we were very proactive, searching for materials, fixtures to add to the mix. She knew Arlene



Landscape designer Michael Schultz designed and oversaw the construction of the outdoor living room with brick fireplace and wood columns emulating classic Prairie style, using a found palette of similarly colored old bricks from a now-defunct Utah brickworks.

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Modern library built-ins, which Wentworth believed were used for firewood storage, masked another surprise: the original dumbwaiter. A new doorway was cut into the paneling, using Douglas fir V-groove paneling found in the basement to accommodate the find. Schriber calls Arciform's ability to get the custom fabricated dumbwaiter and newly built shaft working a feat of science.

The dining room's wildly eclectic decor is a perfect example how the project melds the couple's diverse tastes. Its antique, floor-to-ceiling, copper French mirror from 1stdibs is countered by Schriber's request for an early 1900s farmhouse table. The Fairfax chandelier by Avenue Lighting sourced from Lightology replaced the original silver candelabra, now carefully stored in the attic. Antique French chairs upholstered in coppery green velvet by Kravet echo the mirror.

Neuberger's then-position at an apparel company and Schriber's love of the Steampunk era inspired Wentworth to conceptualize open shelving made of unlacquered brass plumbing fittings and maple wood – sourced by her assistant, Bianca Martone – for an extra upstairs bedroom that became Neuberger's closet. Although Neuberger was rather adamant about not wanting curtains in the home, Lord convinced her otherwise.

"We chose a natural linen with a little bit of fringe," says Lord, "so they wouldn't be on display!"

"I was uncomfortable with the idea of window dressings," admits Neuberger, "but now they're some of my very favorite details in the entire house – especially in the bedrooms and nook."



Rittenhouse subway tile forms the new box around the powder bath's restored laundry chute.

Transforming the basement was the second phase of restoration, which meant the family was able to move in upstairs but were often awakened by the team arriving downstairs, and the table saw starting up at precisely 7:00 a.m. The upside was the ability to create an entire loft-style apartment, replete with exposed beams, cast-iron pipes, polished concrete floors, a living room, a full bath, laundry, a wine cellar, a bar, a bunk room and a large theatre with gargantuan sectional designed by Lord for comfy viewing, sleeping and sipping.

"Chelly Wentworth was really smart about how to keep noise out of the media room," Schriber recalled, "by not sharing walls with the washer, dryer or furnace, and placing the mini refrigerator outside the sliding barn doors. It's a total cave down there."

Everyone agrees that the job was successful because of Neuberger and Schriber's passion for their home, their open minds and their respect for the knowledge and capability of those they hired.

"We all just listened to each other really well," Wentworth said. ♡



An Ushio Shimohara painting pops against the dark gray dining walls, drawing the eye to the elaborate original cornices.



French stylist and Polaroid photographer Maripol's portraits of Debbie Harry and Madonna line a wall fabricated from a combo of reclaimed spruce and Russian pine found in shipping crates and later reclaimed by Portland's Viridian.



The Danish Midcentury sofa from Lookmodern teams with a West Elm coffee table atop two colorful rugs from Urban Outfitters (bottom) and an antique rug from Beam & Anchor (top).