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recipes at its Edina
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Edina Country Club
neighborhood's
haunted houses

Cameras & Lights

Bella Kane's journey into
the world of fashion modeling



*Inside
Donnay Homes*



Orfield Design's remodel of the Rhode house in Edina.

Close to Home

Orfield Design updates and preserves Sunnyside home.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HOUSE AND A HOME? Laura Orfield-Skrivseth, co-owner of Orfield Design & Construction Inc., says it's about merging the personal with the practical. The family-owned company has created living spaces that are both individual and timeless since 1978.

Take the Rhode house in the Sunnyside area of St. Louis Park. Owners Mark and Shari Rhode found themselves with an empty nest after 30 years in the same home. They were overdue for a domestic transformation, particularly the second-floor master bathroom and the main level kitchen. The biggest challenge, as is often the case, was keeping the new details in line with the older home's architecture. "I don't want people to walk in [the house] and say, 'Look what they spent on the redo.' I want them to ask, 'Wow, is this really new?'" Shari says.

"The bathroom was too small and the bedroom too big," Mark recalls. Orfield's solution was to push the bathroom wall three feet into the bedroom and then add a new shower, a new bathtub, flooring and cabinetry. The kitchen was outfitted with a cabinet pantry, a second stove and vent, and new fronts on existing cabinetry and drawers. "We have dinner parties with friends and we all cook together. [The remodel] gave us more counter space. Even though it wasn't huge, it felt much bigger, and that made all the difference," Mark says.

The bathroom was hopelessly outdated. "The only original thing that we loved was the old hexagon tile floor," Shari says. "I wanted chunky white faucet handles marked 'Hot' and 'Cold' for the bathtub, which Laura had to look for. But she found them."

Shari collects antiques, which Orfield-Skrivseth took care to integrate wherever possible. The company



Orfield Design
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used an older fixture from Shari's collection and added Sign of the Crab fixtures. "Old-fashioned porcelain cracked handles are rarely used except in situations where you want it to be historically accurate," Orfield-Skrivseth says.

"We custom-fabricate stuff to match what's existing, and you can't tell what was there before and what was added, even if we added a lot." For example, Orfield made hand-milled trim to match the original baseboards, doors and window casings. "These are little things we take for granted but all serve to further the effect that they were always there." Orfield-Skrivseth says.

Orfield asked Shari to show some of her favorite things. Shari brought out a cherrywood buffet of her grandmother's with lovely curved legs and delicately carved beading. Orfield-Skrivseth used this input to create a custom vanity that blended open shelving for towels with the vintage elements that Shari adored. "[Orfield] did the demolition while we were out of town," Mark says. "When we came back it looked like a haunted house, torn apart, covered in plastic, and coated with a layer of dust." The couple "trusted us to handle whatever came up," says Orfield-Skrivseth.

Orfield-Skrivseth keeps up on trends, codes, structure styles and each customer's particularities. "We subscribe to every magazine—*Architectural Digest*, *Interior Design* and *Remodeling*—so we can see what's out there, which is important because those are the same images our clients are looking at." She reads and absorbs vast chunks of information for later use. "The Midwest is notoriously behind the times compared to the coasts, so I subscribe to West and East Coast associations and bring that to my clients," Orfield-Skrivseth says. "I always go to bed with a clean conscience and I sleep at night knowing that I did what I could."

"Laura addressed things I didn't think of," Shari says. Some of these things are the resale value of the house, its suitability for grandkids, concessions like doggie doors for pets and amenities to serve aging joints. "When we get older we are not going to want to climb into a tub!"

"Hand showers are important," Orfield-Skrivseth adds. "People want to stay in their homes as long as they can." //

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