

Change of heart

The classic facade of this stately residence offers little indication of the total transformation of the interiors and rear of the home

A radical modernization of an interior where zoning regulations require retention of the classic exterior may seem a difficult design undertaking. However, adhering to clean lines and a simple tonal palette can ensure that the traditional and spectacularly modern work together in harmony.

The architect of this upscale remodeling project, Icelander Bjorn Skaptason, was asked by the home owners, also from Iceland, to transform the interior into living spaces that provide enjoyment and ease of living in 21st-century terms. Skaptason had worked on the owners' previous home in Iceland and as a result was asked to undertake this refit.

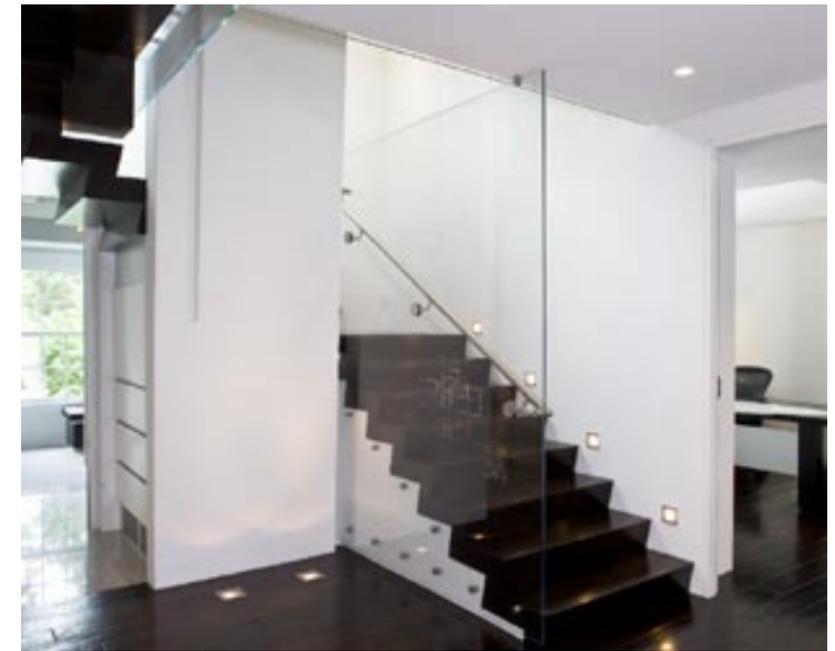
"The exterior had been comprehensively restored around eight years ago. That project focused on architectural details, repairing gutter systems and installing granite steps, a front patio and retaining walls," says Skaptason. "But this remodel addressed everything beyond the front door, and involved a radical reinvention on all levels of the home."

Builder on the project Doug Hanna had also worked on the earlier remodel. He says that the home's interior was gutted before this interior rethink could be introduced.

"Substantial construction work was carried out

Left: Behind this home's classic facade, the entire interior and much of the rear of the home have been transformed. The simple exterior palette of white, gray and black provides only subtle indication of the bold, pared-back interior.

Above: Granite on the driveway, patio and steps is continued in the interior.



Above: A narrow gap between the ceiling and wall planes allows glimpses from the stairs down into the living area. The architect has created playful architectural connections where shadow and light subtly build the home's interior ambiance.



Right: White furniture accentuates the dramatic but limited tonal palette.

throughout, particularly in the basement area," says Hanna. "This had to be lowered as the original space had been constrained by low ceilings."

"It was a major job, because the rear of the house had to be propped up with timber trusses while earthmoving equipment excavated down several feet. In addition, the basement area was extended – borrowing space from under what was to be a new patio at the rear of the house."

New concrete foundations were laid to support the remodeling and the kitchen area was extended – all without disturbing the timber siding on the front of the house.

Hanna's team also stripped out all four levels of the residence, right back to the supporting frame for the original floors. In some cases stresses on load-bearing walls were realigned, with added steel supports introduced – all setting the scene for the fresh interiors.

"With the original small rooms and passages swept away, we created wide, open-plan spaces that connected well visually and in terms of circulation," says Skaptason. "On the first floor, we created a central space around the stairs with most areas in proximity to this. The dining area was moved to the back of the house, adjacent to the

kitchen, maximising benefit of the floor-to-ceiling contemporary glass doors overlooking the new patio and a large swimming pool."

The reinvented living spaces are a picture of minimalist serenity – with white walls, dark-walnut floors and ceiling planes that shift in level. The effect is simple, spacious and sculptural.

"Our approach to the living areas follows through on other levels of the house," says the architect. "The upper floors and freshly dug-out basement were also stripped back and modernised with the same emphasis on shifting ceiling planes, white walls and dark floors."

Top: On the first floor, the open-plan living spaces are loosely focused around this feature staircase. Plans of the original home are etched onto the glass balustrading.

Above: The dining table matches the walnut floor, further simplifying the tonal palette. Strategic reinforcing elements were introduced as the fit-out saw some existing load-bearing walls removed.





Preceding pages: Although the owners are art lovers, an undulating wall in the living area precludes hanging paintings. This wall, as with the ceilings, highlights spatial form. Etched glass surfaces are another recurring interior design motif.

Above: An in-wall fireplace and two-tone granite surfaces melding table and bench are features of the kitchen.

“Essentially, the design encourages the eye to read the spaces as volumes. In some cases, ceilings are pulled back slightly from the walls to allow glimpses from the stairs back down into the living area – the house is full of architectural surprises.”

Other design elements include an undulating wall in the living area and a dramatic central stair with a glass balustrade that looks as if it has been slotted into the space.

“There are three similar staircases in the home, each linking different floors,” says the architect. “An added feature of the first-floor staircase is the inclusion of the home’s original plans, which are

etched onto the glass of the balustrade.”

Words etched or printed on glass also feature in other areas of the residence.

Continuity of materials and finishes is what draws the home together. Identical granite tiles are used on the outside and inside of the home – from the classic frontage to the modern patio at the rear and on many of the interior surfaces in between.

Color also played a part in uniting the disparate architectural styles. The white exterior links with the white interior walls and the dark walnut floors can be seen as an echo of the feature jet black facade facing the street.

A less noticeable aspect of the remodel is behind the scenes, or rather behind the walls. Panel controls are the only sign of the newly installed smart-wiring throughout. A heated driveway can be cleared of snow at the touch of a button.

The new basement has a generous wine cellar, a gallery-style hallway and a machine room that houses the 25 computers that run the residence. An emergency generator set in the back yard ensures that if the national grid splutters, life goes on in the home uninterrupted.

Seen from the rear, the house effectively melds the new patio, modern doors and framing with the

existing facade above – white, gray and black hues combine to harmonious effect.

“Color is key to this project in several ways,” says Skaptason. The sculptural ceilings, pulled-apart elements, the undulating wall – all create light-and-shadow play that is gentle on the eye.

“We spend so much of our day bombarded with color and movement, it seems logical to create a home environment that provides respite from the insistent visual clamor of urban life.”

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Top: Curves and straight lines provide visual contrast in the master bathroom on the first floor. Minimalist finishes and limited use of color give prominence to the leafy scenery.

Above: The upper levels of the home, including the master bedroom, also feature varied wall and ceiling planes. A niche wall cutout provides interest and utility.



Architect: Bjorn Skaptason, Atelier Arkitekta (Iceland)
Builder: S&H Construction
Demolition: U Call We Haul
Excavating, site work, concrete: S+H Sitework Division; Beacon Site Developers and Consultants
Electrical: Driscoll Electrical
Heating: HVAC from Heatech
Plumbing: Chase & Tolan
Paint: Piano 2 in matte white by Andrew's Painting
Landscaping: Logee Urban Landscape Service
Roof: Oak Roofing
Chimney and stucco masonry: European Restorations
Steel: Cape Cod Fabrications
Flooring: Polished gray granite from CM Zottola, O'Hearn Tile, installed by Associated Stone & Tile Installers; Walnut Espresso from Patina Relics
Glass: Etched glass from Peter Houk Etched Glass; architectural glass from Commonwealth Glass
Cabinetry: Jonn Nonni Bergsveinsson
Lighting: Wever & Ducré
Lighting control: Creston
Blinds: Lutron
Kitchen sink, faucets: Franke
Oven: Wolf E Series built-in
Cooktop: Viking sealed burner rangetop, professional series
Microwave: Viking
Dishwasher: Miele Optima
Ventilation: Lifebreath HRV
Vanity basins, toilet: Alessi in white by Laufen
Shower stall: Custom stone
Shower fittings, faucets: Bagno Alessi by Laufen
Wallcoverings: Plaster by Pete's Plastering; satin-finish aluminum
Features: First-floor bath waterfall from Origin Falls

Story by Charles Moxham
Photography by Jamie Cobeldick

Above: The rear of the home merges original facades on upper levels with strikingly contemporary sliding doors on the first floor. These offer several egress points to the rear garden and pool. Uniformity of tone and adherence to clean straight lines connect the two visually.