



REFINED CLASSIC IN THE PARK

Photography by Robert Burge
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New Generation of Design by Ron Wolz

The homebuyer had a long-range vision for the house she wanted. It was driven by family.

“I had a vision for our home that it would be a place for us to grow old in,” she said. “We wanted our children to grow up in this home; have their friends over; and then, for them to come back with their families.”

She also envisioned a place where extended family from around the country could gather for such holidays as Christmas, Thanksgiving or Derby weekend.

Their former 2,200-square-foot house in Seneca Gardens was not going to be that home. But, she said, they bided their time through the turbulent real estate market until one day when she saw her children growing older and she told her husband, “We have three to five years to find the home of our lives.”

But when she happened on the house for sale at the end of Douglass Boulevard – a classic early 20th century white stucco home with black shutters – it still didn’t click for her.

“I didn’t think it was big enough and I didn’t see it fulfilling my vision of family life,” she said.

However, she showed it to her husband four or five months later, after it had still not sold, and “he said, ‘This is it!’ I warned him that it would require a great deal of work, and he said, ‘Okay, let’s do it.’”

So she assembled a dream team – designer Ron Wolz, Vice President of Residential Design at Bittners; architect Dan Fultz; and contractor Keith Morley of Don Johnson Contractors; and off they went.

“The challenge,” said Wolz, “was to update and modernize a classic house with architectural details and still be respectful of its rich history.”

How old a history? “We knew it was old,” said the homeowner. “But at one point, while taking down an

old linen press, we saw, written on the wall, ‘August 1915.’ So it’s 100 years old this summer.”

She thinks it was built by the family of Charles Thruston Ballard for a newly married son or daughter. At one time, she said, it was used by the University of Louisville as the president’s official residence.

Even at 4,700 square feet, she didn’t think it was large enough, so the first thing they did was rework the backside of the house, enlarging the kitchen and adding an adjacent family room and sitting area. By the end of the two-and-a-half-year project, the homeowner estimated that they added 2,500 square feet to the original living space.

However, uppermost in everyone’s mind was respect for the architectural integrity of the home. “It had classic elements that we didn’t want to tamper too much with,” Wolz said. So even as they updated moldings, refinished floors and installed new mantles, they were careful to respect the original feel and style, and to use that style as a template for the additions, improvements and changes they made.

For example, said the Bittners designer, “a signature of the house, for me, were these three pair of amazing steel and glass double doors with sidelights of glass that separate certain rooms. It was such a striking architectural detail that we all agreed these had to stay.”

They painted the steel frames black – “to honor the history of the steel,” said Wolz – and painted everything else white, “for striking contrast, to let these great doors tell their stories.”

To further enhance the story, Wolz had the window sashes painted the same color as the doors, “to emulate the old steel leaded windows of the period.”

Maintaining the classic doors, of course, meant having to maintain the interior walls. That meant sacrificing the large and open spaces that represent











so much of today's lifestyle. "We wanted a house that was not only stately and attractive but also lived the way people live today: big open kitchen, space that could be used to entertain large groups or just the family spending time together," Wolz said.

"We had 60 or 70 people here for a Derby weekend brunch," said the homeowner, "and the space functioned beautifully."

The architects created a new floor plan that nestled the kitchen, family room and bar together. So even with the walls that remained, Wolz said, the colors and lighting pull you through the house. "You don't go from room to room, you flow throughout the space."

Preserving history was only part of the design intent. "We wanted to give this young, vibrant family a lifestyle they hadn't had in their previous home," Wolz said. "Our responsibility is to make sure any changes and additions improve how the house lives for the family. Homes are our nests, our escapes from the world, and there's nothing worse than doing a renovation and ending up with a beautiful house that doesn't work for the lifestyle of the residents."

In this case, that meant a home that a young family of four, plus two dogs, could inhabit comfortably, casually and actively. Taking advantage of the outside light and a careful interior lighting plan, the house is bright and monochromatic. The palette is a lot of whites, pale grays and soft blues, creating what Wolz termed a "serene, classic environment."

"But this is a vibrant family," the designer said, "and we didn't want the house to be sleepy by being all neutral. So we added a lot of pops of color – greens, hot pink, turquoise and aqua – not a ton of color, but enough to accentuate the house. And we were very deliberate in our choices, sometimes in the

fabric of the furniture, sometimes in a pillow, using color in many different ways."

Much of the furniture was chosen to be both elegant and durable. How do you do that? Very carefully, Wolz said. So he placed refined linen and silk fabrics in relatively low-traffic areas, like green ikat chairs in the living room.

"There are always trends in the design world," he said, "and right now ikat, an Asian dying technique that produces interesting color patterns, is resurgent."

But Wolz also gave the family's living areas the opportunity to be lived in.

"Luckily, there have been many changes in the technology of textiles," he said. "Many fabrics are made of woven acrylic similar to awning materials. They're easy to clean and impervious to stains but they have this amazing ability to replicate almost anything you want, even velvet and suede. You wouldn't know by touching them."

Even leathers have improved so much, Wolz said, that he used apple green dining chairs at the kitchen table that can be wiped clean of spills.

"I didn't want a 'can't touch this, don't do that' house," said the homeowner. "I'm not going to be that mom. We want our family to enjoy the house."

In fact, she said, "I bought enough extra fabric to recover all those chairs and pillows, if necessary."

"The main thing was to produce a plan that addresses how families live in the house," Wolz said. "You can give function and style at the same time."

And he found that balance here. "It's vibrant and youthful," he said, "a very happy house."

As the homeowner added, "Bittners gave us the lifestyle we hadn't had before. I guess that's what they mean by 'designing for the way you live.'"











