Award-Winning Architect Shares 9 Renovation Tips


By J. Michael Welton

Architect Ann Sellars Lathrop made the most of every inch in the Old Hill House, a Westport, Connecticut, family residence that Sellars Lathrop Architects renovated in 2007. (Don’t miss the full story HERE.) For Lathrop, the project brought an award and high praise, but like all the work her firm undertakes, it was also a valuable learning experience. In the wake of transforming a 1950s Cape into a practical, modern dwelling with historic home flair, Lathrop offers these words of wisdom to anyone planning a large-scale remodel:

- Eliminate walls to enhance the feeling of space. Our renovation gave the homeowners sight lines between the kitchen, family room, and dining room.
- Raise the ceiling. In the Old Hill House kitchen, we removed the ceiling joists and exposed the roof rafters, adding skylights over the sink.
- Add windows for natural light and a view to the outside, and to make rooms seem larger. A worthy goal is for every room to have windows on two walls.
- Skylights: They’re really important! Abundant light completely changes the mood of a space, and you never have to turn on lights during the day.

- As you make other changes, avoid relocating bathrooms; the cost usually outweighs the benefit.
- Maximize usable square footage not only to improve your quality of life at home, but also to boost resale value.
- Build shelving into every nook and cranny, because there’s no such thing as frivolous storage space.
- The simpler your roofline, the better your bottom line. Gables and other roof features of relative complexity carry a high price tag.
- Insulation pays. This home’s Energy Star rating warranted a rebate from the utility company, and monthly heating costs have plummeted.

For more on Ann Sellars Lathrop, click Here.

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