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Architectural pedigree can be a mixed blessing. For many homeowners, it serves as a source of lasting inspiration; for others it's no more than a passing footnote.

In this family home, designed by prominent architect George Maher in 1893, any design integrity had been lost by successive renovations that left the house divided into three units. What attracted the owners was not the house, with its small rabbit warren of rooms, but the luxury of a large urban lot, a full 55ft wide by 140ft deep.

Architects Gary Beyerl and Steve Jones modernized the house for the new owners, who wanted a fun contemporary home with plenty of space for entertaining and family living – but one that retained a sense of heritage. So they restored the front rooms, installed a new main staircase and gutted the small service rooms at the back of the house. Here they created a large open-plan family area and kitchen with adjacent butler's pantry.

Beyerl says that finding ways to introduce more light to the back of the house was crucial.

"The south-facing exterior wall was clad in large sandstone boulders and had three tiny windows that blocked out most of the light," he says. The architects tore down most of the interior walls in the back of the house and installed three sets of French doors. These lead from the open-plan kitchen and living area straight onto a new decked dining area outside. The kitchen and breakfast island were positioned so that they run parallel to one wall, revealing long unbroken views from the front of the house to the decking area outside.

According to one of the owners, Brad Lippitz, the new view is breathtaking.

"You can see all the way through to the back yard, and the three sets of French doors along one wall help to remove any distinction between indoor and outdoor living spaces," he says.

The unbroken view is accentuated by wooden flooring that runs through the house. New red oak floors in the kitchen and family areas have a grain and character that matches the salvaged original wooden flooring at

the front of the house. Lippitz says it's hard to tell where the original wood floor ends and the new one begins.

Chandeliers from the old living room bring a deliberately fun touch to the kitchen and reflect the owners' desire for a home that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Architect Steve Jones says that the steel column down one side of the island, clad in tiny tiles to match the kitchen backsplash, is another quirky touch – and one they hadn't planned for.

"When we took down the walls we discovered a functional steel column here which had to stay. So we used it as way of anchoring the island, which works as a key feature of the room," he says.

With two young children, the owners also wanted materials that were durable and safe. The outside deck is level with the floor inside to minimize slips and the island bar has no sharp edges. The house may have moved from its original Victorian vision, but restored as a family home it has come full circle.

**The small service rooms in this Victorian family home were gutted and replaced with an open-plan kitchen and family area.**

#### Credit List

**Architects** : Gary Beyerl, AIA and Steve Jones, Burns + Beyerl Architects (Chicago, IL)

**Contractor** : JMD Builders

**Interior designer** : Brad Lippitz

**Kitchen manufacturer** : A & Z Woodwork

**Flooring** : Oak stain

**Wall tiles** : Structural column – Waterworks

**Countertop surfaces** : CaesarStone

**Backsplash** : Erin Adams from Ann Sacks

**Kitchen sink and faucets** : Franke

**Oven** : Thermador double oven

**Cooktop** : Thermador

**Ventilation** : Vent-A-Hood

**Microwave** : Panasonic

**Dishwashers** : Bosch

**Refrigeration** : GE Monogram

**Waste disposal** : KitchenAid

Photography by  
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