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Designer Liz Mearns and architect Christine Kelly collaborated on the radical renovation and expansion of a 1920s house in the Aurora Hills neighborhood of Arlington. The family-room addition (above) centers on a teak coffee table from Noir Furniture and Lee Industries sofas, set before a wood-burning stucco fireplace.





# VINTAGE SPIN

*A design team revisits a 2013 Arlington renovation, reinforcing airy, open spaces and farmhouse style*

Text by DEBORAH K. DIETSCH | Photography by ROBERT RADIFERA

**F**or Liz Mearns, decorating homes in the Arlington community of Aurora Hills is a regular part of her business. “I have worked on about 25 projects within a four-block radius,” says the interior designer, who lives and runs her firm, Imagine Design, in the neighborhood. “The convenience is great, but it also means I have to keep it fresh. No one wants their house to look the same as the one down the street.”

In 2013, she helped repeat clients design a home in the neighborhood in collaboration with architect Christine Kelly of Crafted Architecture. Kelly transformed the original 1920s home on a corner lot by demolishing most of its compact, shingled structure, only preserving the existing foundation, basement and first-floor perimeter walls. The rear of the house was extended with a two-story addition and the front

Renovation & Addition Architecture: **Christine Kelly**, AIA, Crafted Architecture LLC, Alexandria, Virginia. Interior Design: **Liz Mearns**, Imagine Design, Arlington, Virginia. Kitchen Design: Stuart Kitchens, McLean, Virginia. Styling: Charlotte Safavi.



BEFORE PHOTOS

The renovation transformed the original shingled structure and its tiny kitchen (inset photos) into a modern farmhouse (top) with a standing-seam metal roof above a wraparound front porch.

Part of the rear addition, the new kitchen (opposite) is organized around a walnut-paneled island topped with Calacatta Gold marble, which is repeated in the backsplash tile.







reconfigured with a porch. The rebuild expanded the original 3,000-square-foot dwelling into a 5,657-square-foot home, including the finished basement.

Inside, says Kelly, the layout was reorganized to “create a series of intimate and family gathering spaces,” including five bedrooms and baths. The rear extension provides an open kitchen/family room on the main floor, a master suite on the second floor and a rec room in the walk-out basement.

From the front, the home now resembles a modern farmhouse. A porch adorned with gas lamps wraps two sides of the exterior, which is clad in fiber-cement shingles. A new shed separated from the porch by a tiny garden serves as a freestanding garage.

“We worked to make sure the scale of the house from the street didn’t overpower the neighbors,” says Kelly. “The biggest challenge was getting all the bits and pieces to work within the existing zoning.” In renovating, she preserved the home’s original wooden staircase, which connects its two levels, as part of the new build.

About a year after Kelly and Mearns completed the ambitious makeover, the owners sold the house and moved to Texas. Neighbors—a stay-at-home mom and her business-consultant



husband—bought the property in 2015. “We love the neighborhood. It’s close to downtown DC and the airport,” explains the wife. “The setting is what drew us.”

The husband agrees; perched atop a forested hillside, the back of the home faces the trees through tall windows in the kitchen and family room. “I love this part of the house overlooking the woods,” he says. “It’s open to the view, but very private.”

**A Noir Furniture console and custom mirror adorn the entry (top, left), which leads into the open-plan kitchen (top, right) and family room (above); the kitchen’s copper range hood and family room fireplace bookend the space. On one side of the kitchen, a breakfast nook (opposite) boasts a built-in window seat and a chandelier from Currey & Company.**







The new owners, who had previously worked with Mearns, hired her to redesign the interiors to suit their taste and needs. Apart from refreshing some finishes, they kept the renovated spaces intact, says Mearns, who set out to make the living spaces “casual and light-filled, with a lot of natural elements.”

The family room is furnished with comfortable sofas and armchairs arranged around a stucco, wood-burning fireplace. The adjacent kitchen, designed in collaboration with Stuart Kitchens, centers on a copper range hood and a walnut-paneled island topped with marble. In contrast to these bright, open spaces, the dining room at the front of the house is dark and cozy with a charcoal-colored wall covering and a coffered ceiling. The nearby study, which opens to the front porch, is similarly intimate and painted a deep gray.

The preserved staircase leads to the second floor, where the landing and a new dormer have been turned into homework

The elegant dining room (this page) is clad in charcoal-hued wallpaper. The sooty color contrasts well with a gold Currey & Company light fixture that hangs above the Noir Furniture table and Lee Industries chairs. The mirror and console were purchased at Victoria at Home.







## drawing board

### How do you integrate an addition with the existing house?

Christine Kelly: Scale the addition proportionally, create offsets when tying in new materials and match existing rooflines.

Liz Mearns: An addition should be carefully curated to give additional space while relating to the rest of the home. You never want it to look like it's stuck on.

### Tips for defining spaces in an open plan while maintaining flow?

CK: Large, cased openings between spaces, coffered ceilings, or stepping the family room down from the kitchen give detail and definition to open plans.

LM: Groupings of furniture grounded by a rug can define each space; seating should be no more than eight feet apart for conversation.

### What is the best way to work with an architect and a designer?

CK: I like clients to hire the entire team at the beginning, to encourage the sharing of ideas throughout the design process.

LM: Be thorough about the plans from the start because making changes down the road is often more difficult and expensive.



The white-on-white master bedroom (opposite, top), offers a striking contrast to the dark walls and vanities of the adjacent master bath (opposite, bottom left and right), with its built-in soaking tub. The landing at the top of the original 1920s staircase was expanded by a new dormer to create a kids' study lounge (above and inset). Serena & Lily wallpaper complements carpeting from Farsh Carpets & Rugs in Alexandria, while gold accents in the CB2 mirror and ottomans from Patina Polished Living in Old Town enhance the space.

space and a lounge for the couple's two sons, 11 and 15, and daughter, 13. Three bedrooms and a shared bathroom for the children occupy the second-floor spaces where the original house once stood, next to the master suite addition at the rear.

The master bedroom is almost all finished in white. Ivory carpet, bedding, draperies and wall covering were chosen to "create the feeling of a sanctuary," says the owner.

Working with Mearns, the wife says, helped her to overcome her biggest fear: wallpaper. "I was always afraid of it, but

Liz convinced me it's a good way to inject personality into the rooms," she explains. Patterned papers, some in bold colors, now enliven the kids' study space, dining room, master bedroom and powder and mud rooms.

The owners recently worked with Kelly to expand the back deck off the family room into an outdoor entertaining space. They also use the front porch to host family and friends for coffee or cocktails. As Mearns notes, "The house is designed to feel friendly and welcoming"—just like a good neighbor. ■