

Remodeling

How Smart Companies Grow

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May 1999

the big 50

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Blessing & Associates
St. Louis Park, Minn.

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reinvents his dream
house**

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**Your clients are
checking out new
houses. Are you?**

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Clear the air

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Before & After

The Project

Renovate a turn-of-the-century city house, rebuild the front facade, and add a third floor.

Location:

Chicago

Size:

Before: 2,700 square feet

After: 3,650 square feet

Contractor:

Pete Pryor, Pryor Construction, Chicago

Designer:

Mary Partridge, Partridge Architects, Chicago

Cost:

\$255,000

PHOTO: LES BOSCHKE © 1999

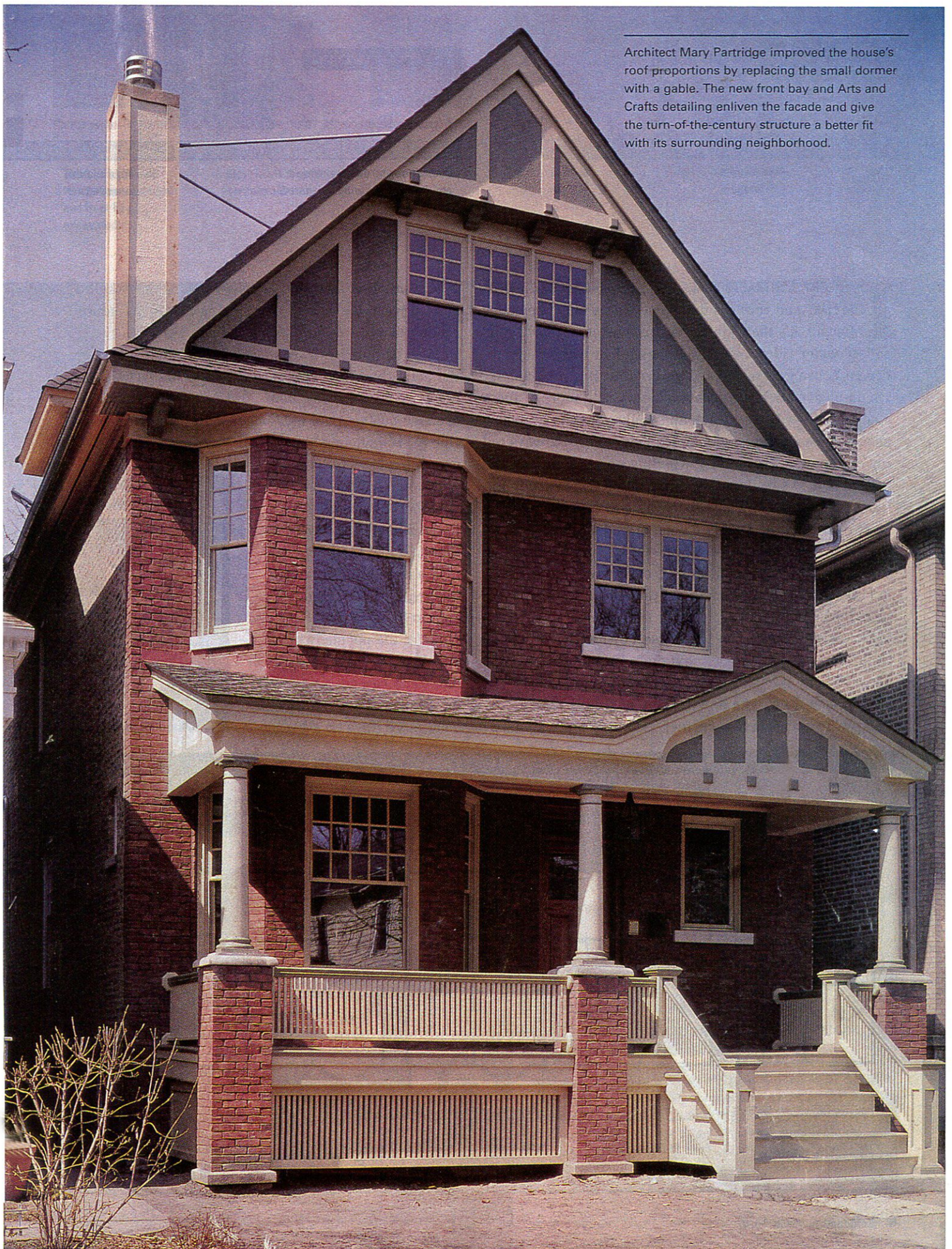
face value

CHERYL WEBER SENIOR EDITOR

A rehab remodeler
reinvents his
dream house.



Architect Mary Partridge improved the house's roof proportions by replacing the small dormer with a gable. The new front bay and Arts and Crafts detailing enliven the facade and give the turn-of-the-century structure a better fit with its surrounding neighborhood.



PROJECT TIMELINE

August 1 – September 20, 1998

DEMOLITION

Demolition and debris removed;
architectural drawings prepared.



October 1, 1998

Roof system removed.

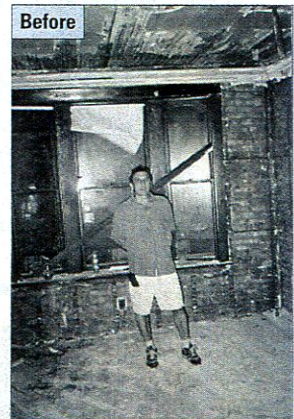
IN THEORY, CONTRACTORS ARE INTIMATELY ACQUAINTED WITH the risks and rewards that come with a major remodel. After all, it's their job to prepare customers for the rollercoaster ride of emotions they'll feel while their dream house gets translated into reality. But remodelers would be even better at customer service if more of them stepped off the beaten track and walked awhile in their clients' shoes, as Pete and Janice Pryor did. "I always tell my customers, 'Remodeling will do a number on you emotionally,'" says Pete, owner of Pryor Construction in Chicago. "I know it in a deeper way now."

For three years, Pete had been eyeing the house on Wayne Avenue. He passed it often on his way to check work on the 10 or so remodels his company has completed in Lakewood Balmoral, an intact turn-of-the-century neighborhood on Chicago's north side, four blocks from Lake Michigan. Pete met the house's owner in 1995 while doing a gut remodel next door. He told the owner he would buy the house if he ever wanted to sell.

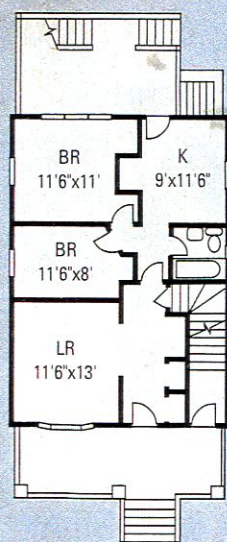
"It was a thing Pete had in his head," says Janice, Pete's wife and business partner. "He didn't talk about it

a lot. But when we found out Gene was going to sell, I started worrying—'Oh no, he's going to buy the house.' I didn't like it; I couldn't see the possibilities."

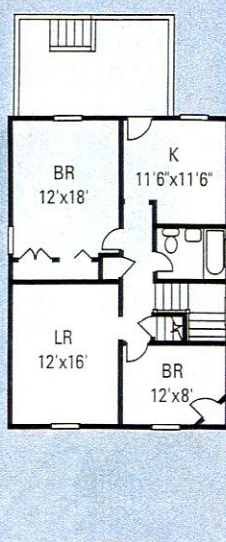
With its faux brick front and limited square footage, the house had little appeal. But homes in this neighborhood are a wise investment. And Pete had targeted the area for business not only because the homes here are ripe for remodeling but also for nostalgic reasons: He grew up a few blocks west and would cut through the neighborhood on his way to the lake. In the 1970s, though, Lakewood Balmoral took a dive. Banks redlined the area; no one could get a loan to fix up or buy property. "A lot of the people here held on," Pete says. "Of those who did, some can get \$400,000 for a house that's not remodeled; more if it's on a big lot."



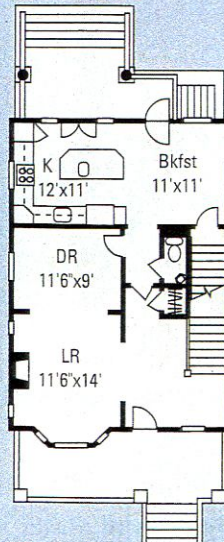
FLOOR PLANS



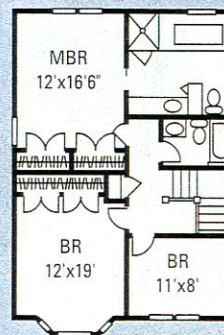
First Floor
Before



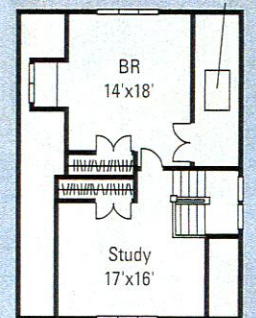
Second Floor
Before



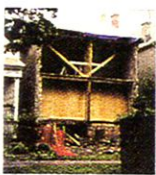
First Floor
After



Second Floor
After



Third Floor
After



October 9 – 16, 1998

EXCAVATION

Third level framed.
House front removed
and front bay
excavated.



October 30, 1998

FACADE

New brick facade
completed.



November 1 – 7, 1998

FRAMING

Windows installed.

November 8 – 23, 1998

FRAMING

Interior
framed.

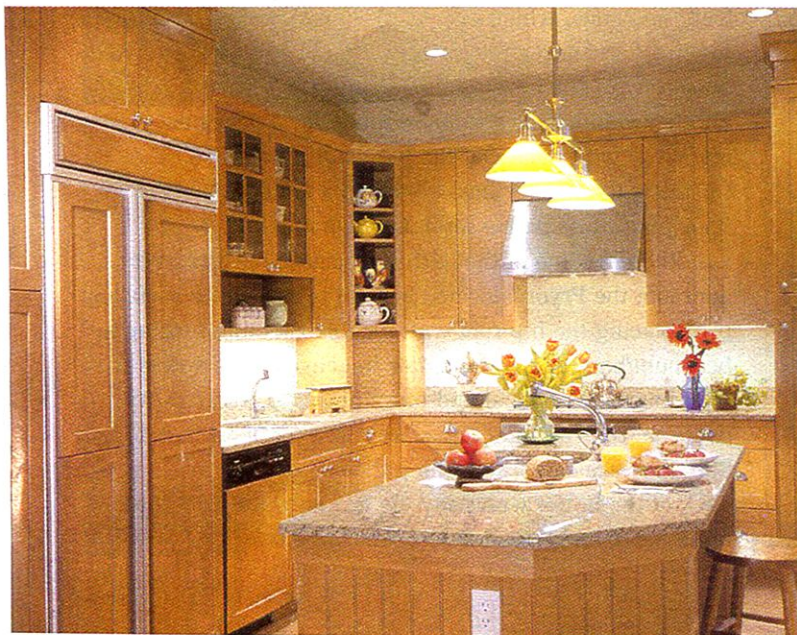
November 24 – December 10, 1998

TRADES

Mechanicals
roughed in.



PHOTOS: LES BOSCHKE © 1999



Adding a bumped-out bay of windows and removing a wall between the dining and living rooms made the small space feel bigger and brighter. A wall in the entryway came down to expose the handsome stairwell (above). A bearing wall was sacrificed for a larger kitchen (left). The new steel beam is pocketed up in the joists so the ceiling appears seamless.

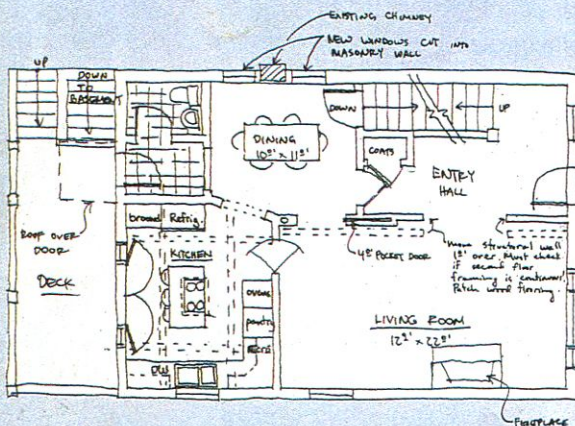


	December 11 – 24, 1998	December 28 – January 5, 1999	January 5 – 19, 1999	January 20 – February 4, 1999	February 5 – 28, 1999	March 1999
►	FLOORS	DRYWALL	TRIM	INTERIOR FINISHES		
	Oak flooring installed.	Drywall/taping completed.	Wood trim, doors, and kitchen cabinets installed. Front and rear porches built.	Interior painted and tiled.	Floors finished. Countertops, sinks, and cooktop installed.	Project completed.

THE PATH NOT TAKEN

To gain a few extra feet in the living room, Partridge tried pushing back the wall and placing the dining room on angle with the kitchen (right). She abandoned that plan because with its proximity to the basement stairs, the dining room would have had to double as circulation space. Another scheme (far right) attached a breakfast nook addition, but homeowner Janice Pryor ultimately wanted the kitchen to open directly to the backyard.

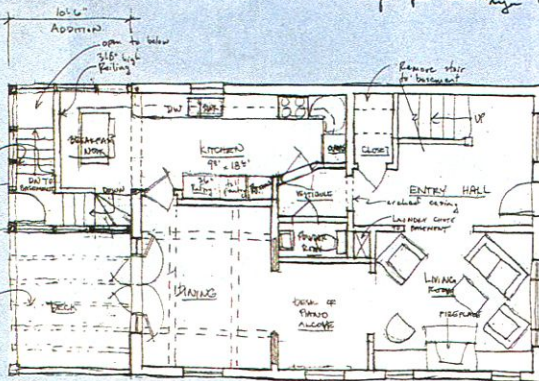
"Sometimes, there's a turning point that leads you to a logical conclusion," Partridge says. "For us, it was switching the kitchen to the other side of the room so we could spread it out." That made it possible to move the basement stair from the foyer to the kitchen and then fit a powder room and a coat closet into the foyer.



First Level PLAN scheme 7

4/18/98

✓ yes per Jan Page 6/11



FIRST FLOOR PLAN - SCHEME A

- * Two-tiered ^{new} ~~windown~~ coat closet in Entry H₂
- * New stair at rear
- * Landing chute passes thru to base
- * Fireplace
- * Breakfast room

There are a lot of people with a lot of equity in their houses now, and they're spending it on additions."

Before the owner had a chance to put the house on the market, Pete offered \$250,000, and the man accepted. "He could have gotten that price in a day, but I offered to shovel out the house," Pete says. "We took out 10 40-cubic-yard cans of garbage. He walked away with his suitcase."

Garbage and debris notwithstanding, the house was structurally sound but in terrible shape cosmetically. And at some point, it had been divided into two apartments. Pryor Construction took the house down to the studs and started over. The two-story house got a total renovation plus a new front bay and facade, front and back porches, and a third floor.

The renovation puzzle centered on how to ease the cramped floor plan. Architect Mary Partridge—who also lives and works in the neighborhood and with whom Pete has collaborated on other projects—drew up over a dozen schemes (see “The Path Not Taken,” left). The Pryors went with a design that obliterated a wall between the kitchen and a bedroom on the rear of the house, opening the expanded kitchen to a new porch by way of French doors. Partridge turned a former middle bedroom on the first floor into a dining room and linked it to the living room. She also reconfigured the front entrance, which previously had two doors accessing the first- and second-story apartments. Moving the front door toward the house’s center and taking down yet another wall beside the stairs made for a gracious entryway with a view of the handsome staircase. Upstairs, the master bath replaced a kitchen, but the floor plan remained essentially unchanged.

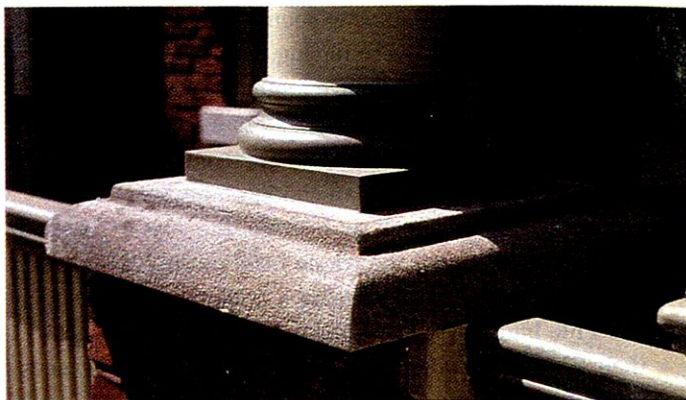
Although some of the early schemes proposed a rear addition, the Pryors decided instead to add space vertically by replacing the hip roof with a gable roof and tucking a bedroom/hang-out room under the eaves. This option was both more economical and more practical. With grown children, the two didn't need an extra room downstairs. Still, they reasoned, spreading their kitchen across the back of the house would lay the groundwork for a future family-room addition for any subsequent owners.

"The project took on a *life of its own*. We saw it was going to be a nice house and decided not to make compromises."

Pete Pryor, Pryor Construction



Arts and Crafts details are typical of the turn-of-the-century homes in Lakewood Balmoral, a neighborhood on Chicago's north side. Clockwise from left: Two tiny new windows flank the fireplace; Partridge placed the old stone caps atop new brick piers; the stained glass window in the entryway was refurbished; fresh beadboard on the porch roof replaces the old; corbel detailing on the fireplace matches that on the facade.



PHOTOS: LES BOSCHKE © 1999





Q: What was the biggest

A: Making the decision to replace the front facade. I'm a let's-go-for-it kind of guy, but spending major money was scary.

Pete Pryor, contractor and homeowner
(pictured with wife Janice)

Pete's idea to add a living room bay was a decision that dominoed. "We were having trouble fitting everything into that limited square footage on the first floor," Partridge explains. "The proposed bay encompassed two stories and was half the facade, and we couldn't match the brickwork; it was in bad condition anyway."

Serious sticker shock set in when the couple realized they'd have to rip off the whole front of the house. Like many homeowners undergoing a major remodel, Janice and Pete had winnowed their wish list to stay within their \$150,000 budget. But when faced with unforeseen problems, the issues were not so clear cut.

"My thing had always been, even though the front of the house was pretty darn ugly, the porch was functional," Pete says. "Deciding to redo the whole front was a big deal. We're not rich people. I thought, 'Where am I going to get an extra \$30,000?'" From the far side of the project, the Pryors are glad they gave in to their first instincts. "When I saw the new brick facade

going up I said, 'Yeah, that's the right thing,'" Pete says.

Rebuilding the facade made for some intricate footwork. While the bricklayers were raising the front, Pete's crew took off the roof system to frame the third floor, leaving an open box. "With no front wall, we had to put up shoring to hold the exterior walls in place," Pete says. "And with the bricklayers meeting the carpenters on the roof, we had to make sure we could tie in the new roof joists and studs with the front facade work."

A month later, Pete made another unhappy discovery. One reason he and Janice had bought this house was because the original trim, doors, and floors seemed to be in good shape. But six weeks of stripping trim met with disappointing results. "After we started renovating the rest of the house, the trim seemed a little beat up," Pete says. "My carpenter said, 'Pete, this place is going to be beautiful, and the trim will be lacking in relationship.' The floor guy said the same thing. There was water damage, and we would have had to patch a lot." They bit the bullet and spent another \$25,000.

Again, though replacing the doors, floors, and trim was a prudent decision, it created construction delays. The order for three floors worth of new doors eventually arrived. While they waited, carpenter Stefan Ianchici rose to the challenge of installing the jambs and frames without the benefit of having the doors on hand.

Janice and Pete moved into their new house March 1, two months behind schedule.

"The project took on a life of its own," Pete says simply. "Once we got into it, we saw it was going to be a nice house and decided not to make compromises." Janice is already looking ahead to further improvements. "We'll have a back patio the width of the 12-foot staircase," she says. "I'll make a nice garden. I envision sitting out there in the summertime, morning and evening; it will be so comfortable and relaxing."

For his part, Pete credits the project for helping him sympathize with customers. If anything, the nine-month experience has confirmed a long-held view of his main role in the company: to hold the customer's hand. "It's no one thing that gets to you," Pete says. "It's just that over the course of six or seven months people get tired of it—

TEAM PLAYERS

Pete and Janice Pryor's relationship with architect Mary Partridge smoothed out the inevitable bumps in the project. A former president of the neighborhood association, Partridge has been living and working in Lakewood Balmoral for seven years. They met by happenstance after a fire ravaged Partridge's house while Pete's crew was working on the block. Pete introduced himself, offered to work up a bid proposal for repairs, and landed the job.

Before the Partridge house was completed, they had paired up on another project and have completed 10 remodels together since. Pete owes their easy relationship to complementary personalities. "I can be a little difficult at times, but Mary calms me down," he says. Recently, Partridge visited one of Pete's jobsites and found a problem with the carpenter's work. "She spent an hour and a half working it out with him," Pete says. "She's very good in that way. Usually, an architect will say, 'Hey, your carpenter is screwing up; take care of it.'"

Of the relationship, Partridge says, "What makes my job easier is that he does have a certain built-in sense of risk factors that a lot of contractors don't take into account. Others underbid the job and then end up pointing a finger at me. He doesn't lose money. Plus they do a good job."

challenge of the project?

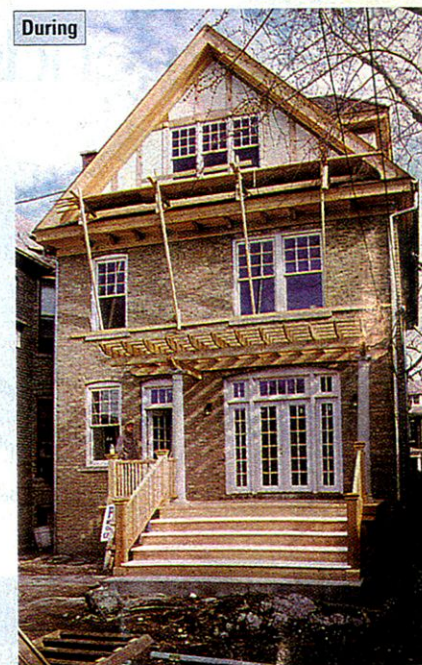
A: Making sure the design of the new facade fit into the neighborhood.

Mary Partridge, architect



PHOTOS: LES BOSCHKE © 1999

A radiant-heat limestone floor warms the master bath (left). Contractor and homeowner Pete Pryor updated the master bedroom with deep closets and large windows that overlook the backyard (below). He also stripped a porch from the rear of the house, adding a new porch (bottom) appointed with a pergola and columns that match those on the house front. A 12-foot-wide staircase and French doors connect the kitchen to the future garden.



whether it's dust, a blown budget, tiles showing up wrong, whatever. If at the end of the day, and when we finish the project, if we can look each other in the face and say, 'Hi, how're you doing,' it's OK if we've had a few cross words."

After rehabbing his own house, Pete says he's more apt to decline major jobs where the owners insist on, say, living in the basement. "It gets hard for them," he says. "It's a dangerous situation."

"You have to be good at taking care of customers," Pete adds. "If you lose their confidence, you're in big trouble." **B**

