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Finding Home

A young family in Wilmette redefines a classic American style on their own terms.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN MCDONALD

Architecture: H. Gary Frank, H. Gary Frank Architects
Interior Design: Ilene Chase, Ilene Chase Design
Home Builder: Richard Bondarowicz, Smart Builders, Inc.



Designer Ilene Chase reimagined the traditional bones of this Shingle-style home in Wilmette, giving it a fresh interpretation. Case in point: the living room's dark stone fireplace, featuring a double-sided structure shared with the library. The asymmetry was embraced with built-in bookcases and a wide mantle to showcase artwork the couple acquired during their travels.

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ith wide porches and romantic gables, it's easy to see why the all-American Shingle-style house endures. For one young family leaving Chicago for lakeside life in Wilmette, the details of that style were

exactly what they wanted. An outdoorsy couple with two young children, they loved the style's traditional yet casual leanings: less Champagne and chandeliers and more whiskey-warm nights by the fire after days spent outside. "We didn't want our home to be like a museum," says the wife. "We wanted practical and comfortable."

To build their vision from scratch, they turned to designer Ilene Chase, architect H. Gary Frank and builder Richard Bondarowicz. Consensus grew quickly on how to interpret the iconic features—beginning with the exterior, which fully embraced the form's innate eclecticism. "Shingle homes can use a wide array of elements," explains Frank, who incorporated classic gables, a turret (topped with a weather vane) and a gently curved roofline arching over the entrance. "Having that curve allows the façade to undulate a little bit, so it's not so flat. It creates a nice, soft feel for the home."

These personable touches continued inside, as the couple never felt beholden to the expected way of doing things, says Chase. "So in each room, we didn't just stick with one style. There's a little bit of each thing they love." The finishes reflected this diverse taste, with the incorporation of rustic, mountain-inspired materials honoring the couple's love of Colorado. "We kept very traditional aspects," explains Chase. "But there was a Western presence they wanted to include, with a lot of organic elements." The contrast proves striking with crisp crown molding, and baseboards and paneling that feel surprisingly fresh against hand-scraped oak floors (the team spent hours testing for "just the right color that had some warmth and wear to it," says Chase). A colorful striped runner adds levity to the staircase, with tones that "are playful, yet still warm and earthy," she adds.

The juxtaposition continues in the kitchen and breakfast area, where white beams stand out against naturally stained white oak panels on the ceiling. "We laid out the pattern painstakingly,"

shares Bondarowicz about the process. "We did several mock-ups so that the proportions were appropriate." For the kitchen island, extra care (and 10 men) was also needed to install the honed Madre Perla quartzite. It's the perfect counterpoint to the custom classic cabinetry by Abruzzo Kitchen and Bath, "as it's not polished and shiny, so you can see the imperfections," says the wife.

Some choices were pragmatic. They embraced the Shingle style's extra-wide hallways "because you know kids, they just crash into things," jokes the husband. Other areas were reimagined completely, adapting the style and purpose of each room to best suit the family. Most of all, the couple wanted to avoid overly formal spaces that would lie fallow. "We were trying to eliminate those rooms you only use on Christmas Eve," the husband notes. This explains the not-so-traditional dining room featuring black-and-white wallpaper and dark furnishings, including the custom table made extra wide to accommodate more people. Bold, graphic and pragmatic, the space proved engaging without feeling too precious.

Though an avid book lover, the husband also didn't want the library to be a solitary space meant just for reading. "He had the idea of doing this library-meets-cocktail-room," shares the wife. "Instead of a formal living area where no one sits, how about a space where adults can hang out?" Chase took inspiration from old-school speakeasies that recalled the couple's life in Chicago, complete with a leather Chesterfield-style sofa, smoky gray wallpaper on the ceiling and deep hunter green on the walls and bookcases. "It's a little bit moody," says the designer. "It has a city vibe that they could escape to within this North Shore home." The speakeasy wouldn't feel complete without a whiskey bar, placed nearby in the front hallway, borrowing the same mood with dark walnut cabinets and an antique mirror backsplash. The unusual feature harkens back to "a more traditional style, when people would entertain in their foyers," notes Chase.

The level of detail possible when building a home surprised the couple. "I had no idea," the wife laughs. "Now I know all about hinges and grout colors that I would have never known in a million years." The process, however, soon became more than construction—it was about creating spaces that looked back at their life together, while making room for their family's future. ■



Above: "We just knew that no matter how comfortable the couch was, everyone would end up around the kitchen island," laughs the husband. So the space became a true showstopper, with custom cabinetry from Abruzzo Kitchen and Bath, mitered Madre Perla quartzite countertops and pendants by The Urban Electric Co.

Opposite: Imagined as an intimate space for family meals, the breakfast nook focused on simple lines and high craftsmanship, featuring side chairs and a hand-knotted rug from Rejuvenation, and a custom table by Avolio Finishes. A simple but elegant Visual Comfort & Co. fixture contrasts against the tongue-and-groove ceiling above.



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Rather than stuffy formality, the dining room offers a bolder, more modern approach to entertaining with statement pieces like the graphic Devon & Devon wallpaper and Hubbardton Forge chandelier. The sculptural table, extra-wide to accommodate more guests, was made by the couple’s friend, furniture designer Rohan Ward.



Right: Tucked away in the foyer between the dining room and library, the festive whiskey bar “just makes everything more social,” says the husband. Chase accented the deep walnut cabinets from Abruzzo Kitchen and Bath with icebox hardware, an antique mirror backsplash and iceberg quartzite countertops.

Opposite: Inspired by old-school Chicago speakeasies, the library is an intimate space featuring a leather Arhaus sofa and a custom color by Benjamin Moore on the walls. Chase fleshed out the couple’s book collection with handmade ceramics by Ryan McDonald, who uses an ancient smoke-fired process to achieve the pottery’s enigmatic patina.





Above: Overlooking scenic views, a Victoria + Albert soaking bathtub from Studio41 creates a moment of respite in the main bathroom, with Imperial Danby tile floors laid out in a herringbone pattern. The nook is completed with an accent pedestal from CAI Designs.



Right: Warm, earthy tones carve out coziness in the main bedroom, borrowing shades of green, blue and orange from the Rejuvenation rug for the bedding. Chase also sought out custom pieces like the tufted headboard in Kravet fabric, and the twin nightstands finished with pulls from Katonah Architectural Hardware.