



The Best of Everything

AN 1884 HOUSE IN CHICAGO GETS A SECOND LEASE ON LIFE

Renovation Architecture by William Massey, AIA
Interior Design by Mariette Himes Gomez, ASID
Text by Amanda Vaill
After Photography by Tony Soluri

This is a love story about two people and a city. A young couple—a wine importer and his wife—had found property in Chicago’s northern suburbs and were about to build a new house for their children and themselves. “Then,” says the husband, “we woke up one morning and asked ourselves, ‘What on earth are we doing?’ We loved Chicago, our kids had just gotten into a wonderful school downtown—why were we moving to the suburbs?”

Putting their property on the market, they began searching for houses in the city. They found nothing until, walking down the street near their children’s school, they saw a blue Queen Anne house with a colonnaded porch and stained-glass windows. It was unoccupied, some of its porch columns had lost their Ionic capitals, and it was surrounded by an ugly fence with a Beware of Dog sign nailed to it; but it was a historic house on a landmark street, a block from Lake Michigan. The couple knew at once they had to have it.

“It reminded me of houses in small towns in Kansas, where I’m from,” he says. “It had char-



acter.” It also had mold and rot, and it had been infested by carpenter ants. “We knew right away we would have to gut it.” They would also have to strip away the aluminum siding, tear off a rickety 1940s side porch and demolish a kitchen wing crammed full of Formica and flimsy pine cabinetry. They would have to carve out another floor’s worth of usable space for additional bedrooms and baths. And they would have to do all

this while seeking approval every step of the way from Chicago’s landmarks commission.

Undeterred, they plunged in, enlisting the Chicago architect William Massey and Manhattan-based but Michigan-born designer Mariette Himes Gomez to help them. A contemporary-minded classicist, Gomez was “thrilled” to be a part of this project. “Any time I get to work in the Midwest, I jump at the chance,” she

“Update a house without tearing it down—what a concept!” designer Mariette Himes Gomez says of the brief given to her and architect William Massey by the owners of an 1884 residence in Chicago. **TOP LEFT:** During the renovation, the original cedar shingles were discovered and reproduced (above). **OPPOSITE:** A mixed-media work by Linda Micko Allen is in the living area.



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"The furnishings were chosen for their interesting profiles and eclectic style—and to suit a family that enjoys entertaining," says Gomez. OPPOSITE INSET AND FAR LEFT: Part of the first floor was reconfigured to create the dining and living areas. Baker dining chairs. Drapery: sheer, Rogers & Goffigon.

LEFT: Gomez, right, with the residents, Janus et Cie chairs. Table, Kingsley-Bare. ABOVE: The kitchen was transformed into a room for serious cooks, complete with a center island and a pizza oven. BDDW stools. Pendant lights, Urban Archaeology. Kallista faucet.

small, square rooms opening off narrow hallways, was intact, details like mantels and trim had been ripped out, the ceilings were covered in acoustic tile, and the original staircase, located in the front corner of the house, was riddled with rot. So Massey and Gomez demolished all of it and constructed a new stairway in the midsection of the house,

opening usable space at the front and rear and doing away with a claustrophobic upstairs corridor. To add square footage without raising the roof (forbidden under landmark regulations), they had to excavate beneath the basement while supporting the foundations—a process that the husband describes as "a nightmare." "I just kept telling myself, 'The kids

go to school down the block. The kids go to school down the block,'" he says. Things brightened as the new residence emerged from the chrysalis of the old. The claustrophobic suite of reception rooms on the first floor was replaced by a cozy library in the front and an airy living and dining room spanning the center of the house,