

# Bethesda Magazine HOME

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CELIA PEARSON

## 180 House Appropriations

Designers are digging the blues—with the cool color popping up in everything from rugs to wall sconces.

By Carolyn Weber

## COVER STORY

## 182 The Element of Surprise

On the outside, the Chevy Chase house looks much like any other in the neighborhood. But step inside the renovated interior and you'll feel as if you've been transported somewhere quite exotic.

By Jennifer Sargent

## 188 Stylish to a Tea

A kitchen-and-bath designer commissions a makeover for her Bethesda bungalow—and gets a Japanese teahouse for two.

By Nigel F. Maynard

## 194 By the Numbers

A look at the most expensive houses sold in the area, as well as home sales trends by ZIP code.

HOME COVER PHOTO BY ANGIE SECKINGER



The Japanese teahouse influence is apparent in the porch of the Gilmer's remodeled home, which grew from 2,000 to about 4,000 square feet.



# Stylish to a Tea

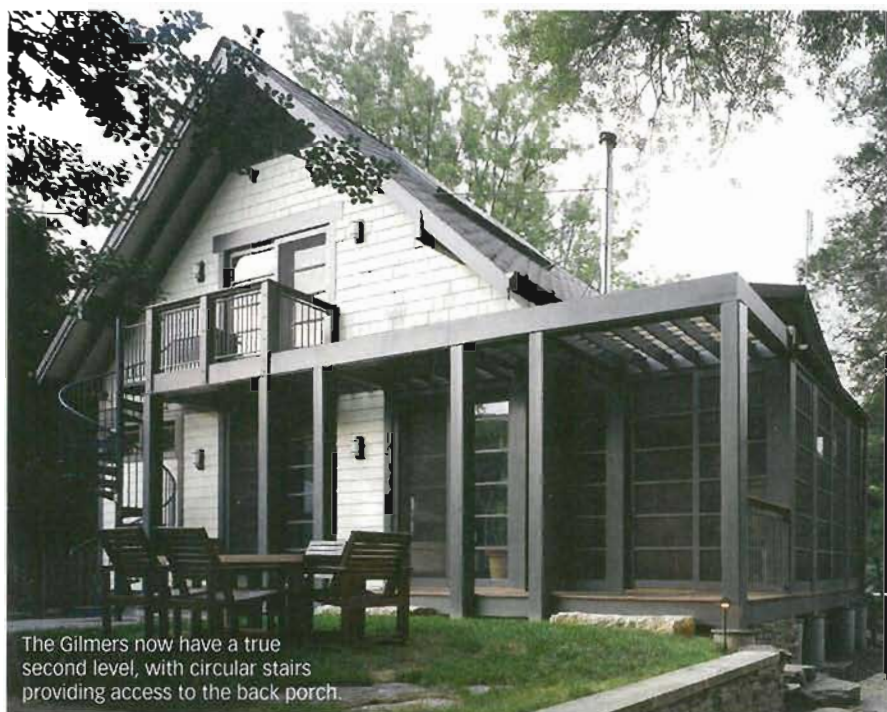
A kitchen-and-bath designer commissions a makeover for her Bethesda bungalow—and gets a Japanese teahouse for two

By Nigel F. Maynard

Photos by Celia Pearson



The 1928 Sears kit home, pre-renovation



The Gilmers now have a true second level, with circular stairs providing access to the back porch.

In her 20-plus years as a kitchen and bath designer, Jennifer Gilmer has transformed countless neglected kitchens into light-filled spaces, but it wasn't until 2005 that she undertook a major project for herself. That's when she and her husband, Bill, decided to remodel their bungalow on Bradley Boulevard in Bethesda.

Built around 1928, the couple's Sears kit home had been "somewhat improved" before they bought the property in 1997.

"It had all new wood floors, a new kitchen [good enough to live with], a new master bath and powder room," says Gilmer, the president and owner of Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen & Bath in Chevy Chase. "At the time, we knew that we would eventually remodel the kitchen, but we didn't plan on renovating the exterior."

Years later, though, when the house needed a new roof, the couple was forced to rethink that decision. "The expense was so great that we had to decide if we wanted to expand the house or not before putting one on," Gilmer says.

In 2003, they decided to explore the idea of renovating and expanding the house.

"Because I'm involved in the building industry, I know a lot of architects," Gilmer says, "but I just wasn't sure which one to use."

Fate stepped in when Gilmer found permit drawings from the previous ren-



The thoroughly modern kitchen



A sink and pullout cutting board in the butler's pantry

ovation while she was cleaning one day. The architect listed was Amy Gardner—one half of the Silver Spring-based firm of Gardner Mohr Architects. Gilmer thought Gardner's familiarity with the house made her a good candidate for the job.

"I first did some work on the house in 1994 for the previous owner, and the house needed a lot of work [back then]," says Gardner, an associate professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. The house had major structural challenges, she explains, including inadequate support between the roof and the walls, bowed walls and badly sagging ceilings.

Jennifer and Bill, who is the service

and delivery manager for Gilmer's company, were clear on their requirements: a true second floor with a master bedroom, patio doors for easy access to the backyard, a screened-in porch and an eat-in kitchen, among other things.

"We originally thought that we were going to have a single-story addition on the back, but we felt like adding a two-story addition and maximizing the size of the home would pay off in the long run," Jennifer Gilmer says.

The Gilmers were in sync with Gardner on the design direction. She showed them how the bungalow look was inspired by Asian architecture. Using a Japanese teahouse as a reference, the architect convinced them they could improve the bungalow with a design



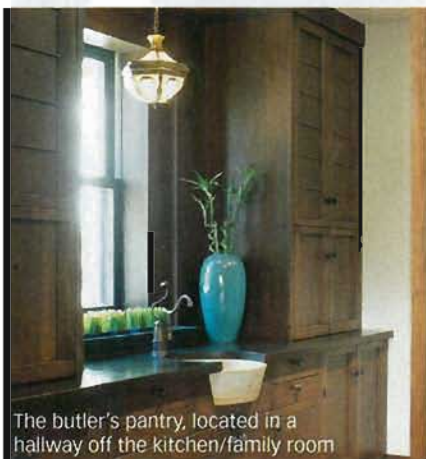
In the family room and kitchen area, a freestanding stove provides warmth while a wall of glass doors lets in the light.



Gilmer used Macassar ebony veneer cabinets in the kitchen.



A separate faucet fills large pots in a prep area.



The butler's pantry, located in a hallway off the kitchen/family room

rooted in traditional forms but filtered through a modern lens.

With the renovation, the house grew from 2,000 square feet to about 4,000. The architect preserved the front rooms of the house but removed the entire roof and attic. She reconfigured the front porch with wood-and-steel columns that sit on granite bases and added a full second floor with dormers, as well as a screened-in porch at the back of the house. Fiber cement siding and a faux slate roof cover the exterior.

Visitors to the house enter into a large living room. To the left, double doors lead to a piano room/parlor, while a formal dining room lies straight ahead beyond the living room. A door in the corner of the dining room leads to a small hall and entrances to the powder room, first-floor bedroom and the basement.

Beyond the formal dining room is the pantry, "the place where the real transition happens from the very faithful Craftsman to the modern/Asian," Gardner says.

The butler's pantry is located in the hallway that leads to the kitchen/family room. It contains a microwave and

convection/steam oven hidden behind bifold doors. It also features a prep sink and a copper countertop.

The large kitchen located at the back of the house is where Gilmer experimented with new ideas, using dark-toned copper, exotic veneer, wenge (a dark, African hardwood) and glass.

"My original idea for the kitchen was that it had to be traditional," Gilmer says, "but after seeing how Amy made the addition on the back so contemporary, I was inspired to create a more contemporary kitchen."

Gardner set the stage with a coffered ceiling, a wall of glass doors leading to the screened-in porch and terrace, and clerestory windows that wash the space in light. Gilmer, in turn, used Macassar ebony veneer cabinets and an island with a wenge butcher-block countertop to anchor the space. A green/yellow glass tile backsplash adds a pop of color.

"Having the sink in the island is great because I can socialize or watch TV while cooking and doing the dishes," Gilmer says. "I designed a butcher-block top that can slide over most of the sink and expand the counter space."

Gilmer did her best to minimize appliances, painting the refrigerator black to reduce its visibility and hiding smaller gadgets behind bifold doors. The kitchen lacked the space for a freestanding breakfast table, so she designed one that slides under the island and can be pulled out to seat eight.

The Gilmers now have a proper second level, as well, complete with a large master suite, two guest bedrooms and a complete in-law suite with a balcony and circular stairs for access to the back porch.

Extending the house made the backyard smaller, but it's now a much more enjoyable space. To create a roomlike feel, Gardner designed a raised terrace that's almost level with the interior and the porch.

"When you open up all those doors, the spaces feel like they are connected," the architect says.

**Located on a lot** that's about 75 feet wide by 175 feet long, the house retains the spirit of a traditional bungalow even as it appears dramatically different, with materials such as resin panels, steel, mahogany and copper lending a modern edge.

"We used a broad palette of things that can be used in either a modern or traditional setting," Gardner says. "It's about how we put things together."

Eight months after construction began in November 2005, the couple moved into their new digs, though the master bath and hall bath wouldn't be completed until a year later.

Married for 24 years, the Gilmers share the house with Maggie, an Airedale terrier and German shepherd mix, and Nibbles, a coonhound mix. They love the entire house, but mostly use the kitchen/family room area and the screened-in porch.

A place for family and friends to visit, the home also has become an auxiliary showroom that Gilmer uses for clients interested in some of the kitchen, wet bar and bathroom features. Renovating the house provided Gilmer with a lab to experiment.

"It was great fun," she says. "I tried out new ideas so that I could make sure they worked. I have since incorporated these ideas into my clients' kitchens."

More than anything, the Gilmers appreciate the home's design ingenuity.

"We really wanted a much more modern house, but we thought that we'd have to keep with the traditional American bungalow look," Jennifer Gilmer says. "Not only did Amy find a way to honor the traditional house from the front elevation, but she also found a way to add a much more modern, contemporary feel to the back. The transition from the old to the new melds so well that it's uncanny." ■

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