



Birth Pangs

Remodeling is like childbirth, one couple discovers

By Julie Foster

When Sukhjit and Colleen Johl bought a 2,200-square-foot house in Curtis Park in 2002, the couple had one child. When they decided they wanted another baby, they knew more space would be necessary. They soon arrived at a second realization: The neighborhood and the Spanish-style house had captured their hearts.

“We looked out in the suburbs but we just love Curtis Park,” Colleen explains. “This is our first house in town, and we just didn’t want to sell it.”

Architect Michael Malinowski was familiar with the house and its history.

So they opted to stay put and add a second story. The house has been home to multiple owners over the years and has undergone several remodeling projects.

Local architect Michael Malinowski was familiar with the house and its history. The Johls contacted him to draft a set of plans for their addition.

In addition to wanting extra space, they needed two things for the addition to be successful.

“We really wanted to keep the integrity of the house plus respect the



Located on a small street in Curtis Park, this home has room for a growing family

heritage of the neighborhood,” says Sukhjit. “I think his plans achieved that.”

The timing couldn’t have been better. While planning the addition, they discovered they were pregnant. They decided to move out during the construction and move back in just before the baby was born. The project was completed on schedule in nine months.

“We rented a home about a block away, and that made a big difference,” says Colleen. “I could

walk over every day and check on the progress of the project.”

Being close helped allay some of the couple’s anxiety. Both are very happy with the results of the project and praised Malinowski’s firm, Applied Architecture, and their contractor, Mills Builders. Still, they voiced the strain they experienced as first-timers dealing with remodeling an older home.

“We were pretty green about how the process worked,” Sukhjit says.

It would have been easier, says Sukhjit, to build a new house. But

like childbirth, the more that time passes, the more likely he would be to consider going through it again. “We found out it takes the same amount of time to make a baby as to complete a remodel,” he notes.

Colleen is happy with the extra space and how well the addition maintains the character of the house. She notes she experienced her own moments of stress. “You just have to be prepared to make decisions quickly,” she says.

Home continued on page 40

She also notes the odd little things you become aware of once you start to remodel your home.

“It’s a funny thing, but none of the doorknobs matched,” she says. “We never noticed it before, but some were brass and some were silver, so we did end up matching them all up.”

The footprint of the house has not changed. And the front of the home is essentially the same, so from the street there is no feeling of being overwhelmed by a looming second-story addition. Inside, an elegant oak staircase with a wrought-iron railing leads to the second floor.

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The Johls now have a master bedroom and bath; a bedroom for each of their children with a Jack-and-Jill bath; and a spare room that is



Arched doorways are abundant in the home

currently Colleen’s sewing room but could be converted into a guest room. There’s also a small but functional balcony with a treetop view that’s perfect for tea for two.

Still, some individuals may question whether a second-story addition on an older home respects the character of this neighborhood. After 28 years as an architect and 2,000 projects working on family homes in Sacramento’s older neighborhoods, Malinowski thinks the project blends into the neighborhood.

“It is possible to create a larger home in a classic older neighborhood that fits in and still maintains the character of the original house,” he says. “And you can create a two-story house and not have it be a two-story box.”

What tips do the Johls have for those undertaking the remodel of an older home? Colleen stresses the importance of knowing what type of a look you want before you begin. Also, set an allowance for the project. This helps keep you on track and will help you focus your choices. And most importantly, work with professionals who will be there to help when issues arise.

If you have a home remodel that you think would make a good story, contact Julie Foster at julieincarmel@hotmail.com. ●



The master bedroom is a relaxing and calm retreat



Family playtime in daughter Ella’s room. Left to right, Sukhjot holding Ella, Colleen and Nicholas.