

# Tradition with a twist

A 98-year-old house opens up without abandoning its past

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**"A lot of people** want to remove molding and trim to make an old building seem new," architect Cary Bernstein says. "Yet those details are there for a reason—usually for proportion and scale." And a balance between old and new can give a house character. That argument grew on the new owners of a San Francisco row house whose modern tastes weren't reflected in their 1908 Victorian.

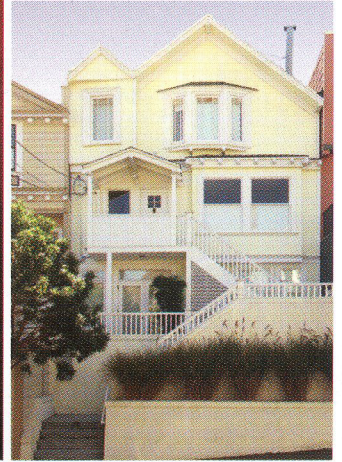
When a preference for modern meets architecture that's traditional, the tendency is to eradicate anything old. But to Cary Bernstein, that's the wrong approach. Instead she worked with the homeowners to give their home a modern heart.

After remodeling, the exterior, layout, and molding remain largely intact. But now the molding and walls are all white, forming a neutral backdrop for contemporary furnishings, finishes, and fixtures. The contrast enlivens the interior design.

Another increasingly popular remodeling move is to eliminate



White paint and modern accessories throw period details such as the banister into relief. The living-room cabinetry's gunmetal blue patina picks up on the furnishings' deep, rich hues.



walls to create larger rooms. In this house, however, Bernstein felt that changing the scale of the rooms wasn't appropriate. "Many walls in older homes are there for structural reasons," Bernstein says. "Often people take away walls to make open, fluid space, but in the end, those spaces can fight each other." Instead of completely removing walls, she simply made openings bigger, allowing rooms to share light and space while subtly maintaining their original shapes.

That's not to say the house is perfectly preserved—this was a remodel, not a restoration. The kitchen is a telling example of how times and lifestyles have changed. A structural beam and the peninsula mark the boundary between kitchen and dining room, but the two rooms are now open to each other. Seating on one side of the peninsula makes socializing easy. Sleek cabinetry, stainless steel appliances, and a galley layout add to the contemporary feel. "Old kitchens were cramped and strictly utili-



tarian," Bernstein says. "That's not going to work for a modern family."

Another 21st-century decision was to expand the basement. The bottom level was excavated to make it larger, and now there's a laundry room, guest room, full bathroom, and a family room that can be closed off to form another guest room.

A series of cabinets and pocket doors provide the desired flexibility. "We added pocket doors here because they're used upstairs," Bernstein says. "They're a classic period detail used in a modern way—making everything hang together."

**DESIGN:** Cary Bernstein Architect, San Francisco ([www.cbstudio.com](http://www.cbstudio.com) or 415/522-1907) ✨

**From the flat-screen TV in the new basement family room to the kitchen, the vintage row house lives modern.**