

# Modern Classic

A historically accurate renovation that's also family friendly. **BY CHERYL MEYERS**



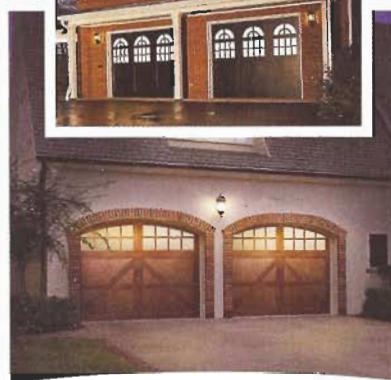
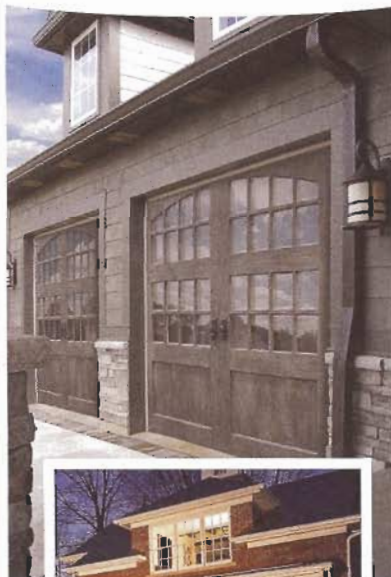
**S**tanding in the kitchen of her newly renovated home, Cara Bechter is rifling through stacks of newspaper clippings more than a half-century old. Finally, she finds what she's looking for: a picture of Homer Bingham—the Chicago lumber baron who built this historic Colonial house with his wife, Addie, more than 80 years ago.

Ever since Bechter and her husband,

Don, both 46, bought the red-brick home in Morgan's Subdivision Historic District (sandwiched between Congress Park and Cheesman Park) and started on the year-long renovation/addition, Homer and Addie Bingham have been on their minds. "I decided from the get-go that if we did this, we were going to do it right," Cara says. "I would rather have not touched the house at all than put a Tuscan-style

**LIVING HISTORY** The family-room addition, complete with period light fixtures, offers a spacious place to relax. The dining room (foreground) is part of the original home. Left: The exterior of the early 1900s Colonial.

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kitchen in here." What's more, during their research the Bechters discovered the home was designed by a well-known architecture firm of the era, Fisher and Fisher. So they tracked down reclaimed brick to match the exterior and trolled antique stores for period fixtures—all in the name of preserving the home's integrity.

Of course, part of that had to do with city requirements: The house was designated as a landmark in 1978, and any major renovation plans had to be preapproved by Denver's Landmark Preservation Commission. But when it came to the interior decor, the Bechters chose to maintain the home's intended style, right down to the crown molding.

The remodel wasn't just about being true to history, though. The Bechters have three children—ages 10, 12, and 15—who need room to spread out for homework and relax with friends. The home's antiquated floor plan—with a formal dining room, living room, and office on the main floor—would have been great for the home's original owners; you could easily imagine Homer smoking his pipe by the fireplace. But for the Bechters, it meant that everyone always ended up in the kitchen. The young family had moved out of their Washington Park home

because it was too cramped, and they didn't want the same thing to happen in their new digs.

Which is why the Bechters called in architect Steve Barsch to rethink the space. Barsch reconfigured the entire back half of the house with a 2,000-square-foot addition, bumping out the walls to include a family/television room, mudroom, and breakfast nook on the first floor. Upstairs,

the master suite received a bigger closet and bathroom, plus a deck that overlooks the backyard's mature foliage. The basement was finished to include a game room and bar. "I was stuck in the kitchen, and Don would hide out in the office," says Cara of the old layout. "Now we can have a football game going on in the family

room, food in the kitchen, and people in the basement. Sometimes I can't believe it's the same house."

After the demolition was complete, the Bechters hired interior designer Beth Armijo, who also works with the Design District's Design Connection, a free service that matches designers to clients. Armijo had worked for several years in San Francisco, where she gained experience with historic renovations. "The goal—and biggest challenge—was to make sure we

## Design Notes

**Architect** Steve Barsch,  
Steve Barsch Design,  
303-534-1121

**Contractor** Ari Larraz,  
303-393-1950

**Designer** Beth Armijo,  
Armijo Design Group,  
303-877-3343, www.  
armijodesigngroup.com



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**BATH TIME** A clawfoot tub adds a traditional touch to the master bathroom.

used products that fit accordingly to the period," Armijo says of the project. "But at the same time we wanted it to look and act fresh and innovative."

In the kitchen, Armijo chose new, larger-size appliances to make the space functional. But to keep it from looking too modern, she called for handcrafted, white wooden cabinets (built by the contractor) and black-granite countertops with an antiqued finish that mimics soapstone—a material commonly used when the house was built. The kitchen's classic Carrera marble backsplash also maintains the traditional feel.

Historically, the home wouldn't have been lit with overhead can-lights, so Armijo purchased antique and restored light fixtures at Denver's Table M Lamp Restoration, and had them rewired to fit city codes. The brass chandelier in the foyer was reclaimed from a similar-aged mansion on nearby Humboldt Street; the elegant brass sconces in the family room are from 1913.

The furniture is a mix of the Bechtlers' existing pieces, plus pieces and fabrics Armijo tracked down to play well with the architecture as well as with the kids. The kitchen-island bar stools were old, for example, but Armijo added playful black-and-white houndstooth cushions to make them look new but with an old-fashioned twist. Armijo calls the overall aesthetic a "fresh take on a classic feel"—one that's comfortable for the Bechtlers, and where Homer and Addie Bingham might have felt at home too. ▲

**Cheryl Meyers** is a contributing editor for 5280. E-mail her at [letters@5280.com](mailto:letters@5280.com)