

Home remodeling - the McMansion alternative

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When Paul Zuch's Capital Improvements construction company bought a house on Woodland Drive in Preston Hollow and demolished it down to the shell, the neighbors were worried that Mr. Zuch planned to build a McMansion on the 70-by-140-foot lot. Neighbors walking by would stop and ask what his plans were for the house, he says.

Their concern was justified. Along Woodland and other streets north of Northwest Highway, growing numbers of two- and three-story homes have replaced smaller homes - built there in the 1950s.

Mr. Zuch reassured the neighbors, including next-door neighbor Gordon Askew, that he was equally concerned about not overbuilding the lot. Instead, he planned to keep the same footprint of the original 1,700-square-foot house. He also added a set-back second story on the country French-style design that makes it appear to be a 1 ½ - story plan and not a full two-story home.

"It doesn't totally dwarf the neighboring houses," Mr. Zuch says. "We are very sensitive to the mass of the house on the lot."

Preston Hollow streets have become a hotbed for custom builders and remodelers who are buying up homes mostly to level them and build larger ones. Some days on Woodland, the construction vehicles line up on both sides of the small street. The noise of saws and hammers can be heard throughout the neighborhood.

Mr. Askew, who has lived in his one-story home since it was built on the old Caruth family farm in the 1950s, is watching while other houses in the neighborhood are replaced with much larger ones. Next-door, a 5,500-square-foot residence, being built on the site of a small, one-story house, is in the framing stage. The nearest wall of the new construction is 21/2 feet from Mr. Askew's driveway.

"They are trying to do too much with these lots," says Mr. Askew, an amateur historian for the homes on his block. Given a choice, he likes the house Mr. Zuch built.

Remodeling, rather than scraping and building new houses, is the focus of a home show this weekend sponsored by the 250-member Greater Dallas chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). The tour will feature 13 homes that have been extensively remodeled. The homes are in Kessler Park, the Park Cities, North Dallas and the northern suburbs. Tickets are \$12 at The Home Depot stores. For more information on the tour, visit www.naridallas.org.

Mr. Zuch, who is chairman of the NARI Dallas chapter, bought the original house on Woodland as an investment for about \$400,000. To make a profit, he says builders need to sell a property for about three times what they buy it for. That means if he had scraped the house and built an entirely new one, he would have had to design and build a home that could be sold for \$1.2 million.

Properties in this neighborhood sell for about \$275 per square foot. To get \$1.2 million, he would have had to



Photo by Moses Olmos
Paul Zuch, president of Capital Improvements, did extensive remodeling of a 1950s Preston Hollow home, adding a second story and doubling the square footage of the residence while keeping the same footprint on the lot. The award-winning design is one of 13 homes on tour this week by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

build a new house with 4,400 square feet of living space – or about 1,000 square feet more than he believes the lot would easily accommodate.

Mr. Zuch wanted to keep the house in the \$850,000 range and the size of it to approximately 3,400 square feet. So he and his crew, who build and remodel about 30 houses a year, had to do an extensive remodeling of the existing house – not build a new one in its place.

By reinforcing the old foundation and keeping the outer walls, he saved about \$50,000. Everything else, including a third of the original three-car garage, was torn out and redesigned. The kitchen was moved from one side of the house to the back, where it offers views of the backyard and pool. The floor plan was designed to create larger, more open rooms. A second floor for three bedrooms was added.

By keeping the same footprint of the original house, Mr. Zuch also saved two large trees in the backyard. And he was able to add the pool and a pool house in place of the third bay on the garage.

Months before the home was completed, Mr. Zuch had four competing bids for the home – such is the demand for properties in this neighborhood.

A neurosurgeon at Baylor University Medical Center bought the home for his family of five.

"When we stepped into this house, we were very pleased," Reham El-Sherazi says. "It has such a pleasant feel." She and her husband, Dr. Waleed El-Feky, were about to buy an older home in the neighborhood when they found this house on Woodland.

Then pregnant with her third child, Ms. El-Sherazi says she fell in love with the open floor plan of the four-bedroom, 3 ½ -bath home. She also liked working with Mr. Zuch and his team because they finished the house "on time and on budget."

"I made them a promise – I would have them in this house before she delivered the baby," Mr. Zuch says. That meant he had to finish the house in five months, not six or seven as he originally planned.

He says proudly, "They moved in two weeks before the birth."

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