A Seattle couple's 12-year master plan

Art of the Addition

In six phases, a 640-square-foot house is doubled without one large cash outlay

When they moved into their one-story Seattle house 12 years ago, architects Mary and Ray Johnston knew it was going to go through several incarnations on the road to its ultimate two-story form. Sound master planning let them nudge the project forward in stages as time, budget, and necessity allowed. This year, after half a dozen phases, the project is nearing completion.

The phasing didn't necessarily save them money, but it did let them comfortably complete their grand remodeling adventure without any monumental cash outlays.

The original 640-square-foot house had just one bedroom, which would not do for a couple with a 1½-year-old daughter. "The first thing we did was demolish a rickety shed attached to the back wall and add 12 feet across the back of the house for a second bedroom and a dining room," Mary says. "We just put a flat roof over it, but we framed it with 2-by-10s in anticipation of a second story."

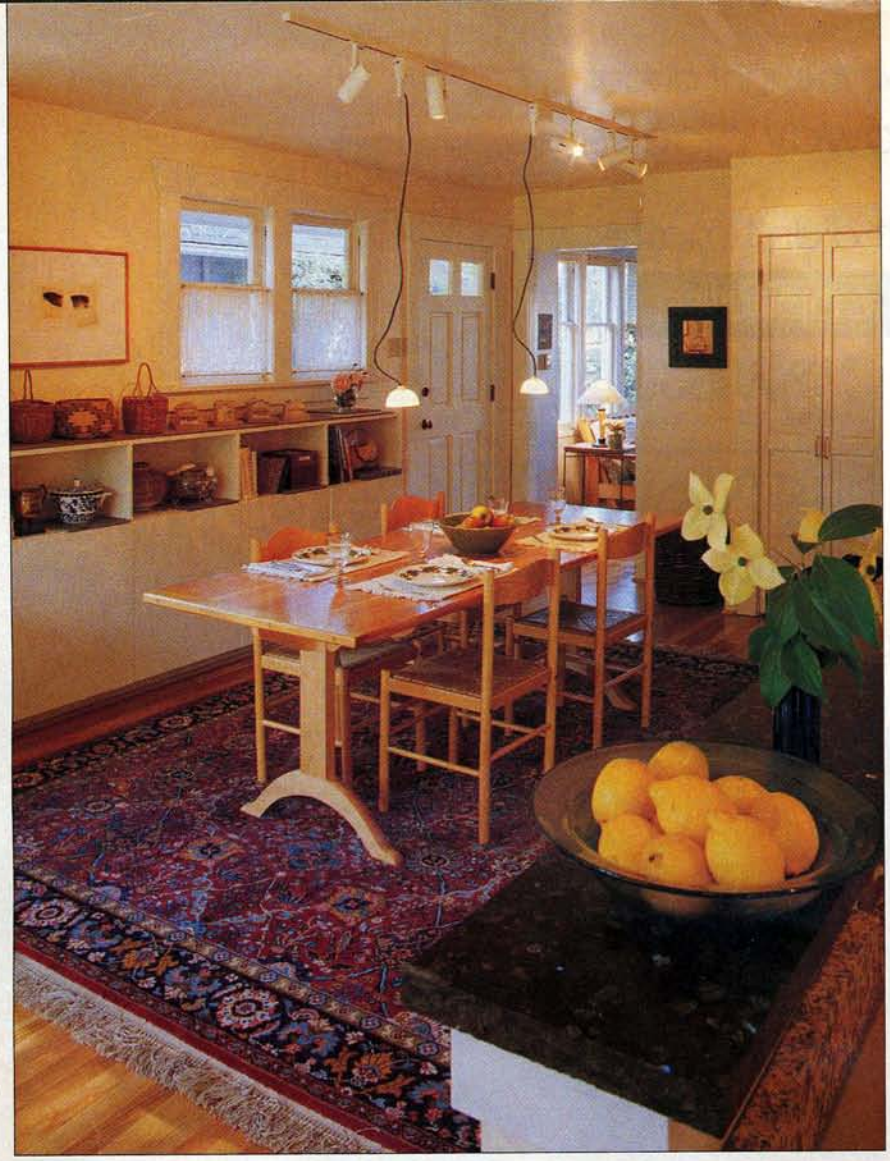
Three years later they took the next step toward their addition: they repositioned an existing basement stairway in anticipation of lining it up with a stairway to the new second-floor addition. At the same time, they moved the front door from the street front to the side of the house. The living room expanded into the old front entry while the old front porch became a vine-covered balcony, which helps to make the living room seem more spacious. The new front door leads into the dining room and kitchen. Is this a problem?

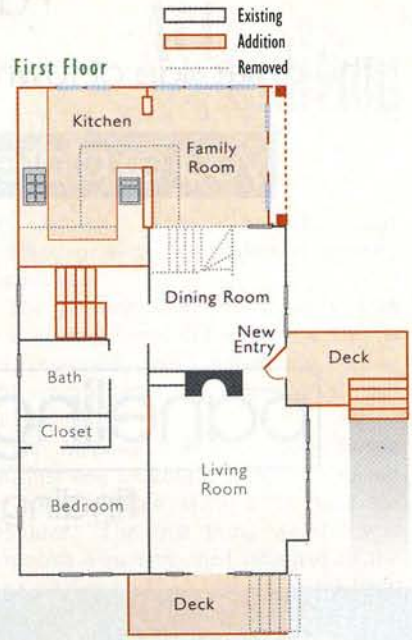
"Having the entry directly into the dining room is very much us. We're informal people and the kitchen–dining room is the heart of the house," Mary says.

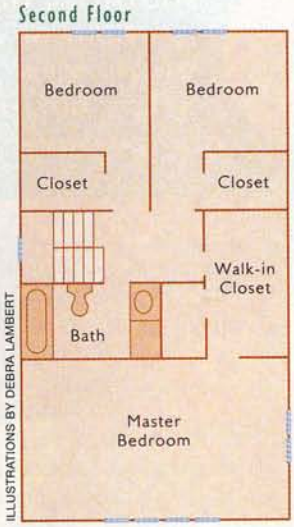
Three years later came another step: a new floor for bedrooms. "We hired a framing contractor to pull off the old roof, then frame the second floor and install the windows," Mary says. "Ray and I roofed, hung wallboard, did interior framing, electrical, finish plumbing, and

JAMES FREDERICK HOUSEL

FROM THE OUTSIDE, THE SECOND-FLOOR ADDITION TO MARY AND RAY JOHNSTON'S HOUSE LOOKS AS IF IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE.

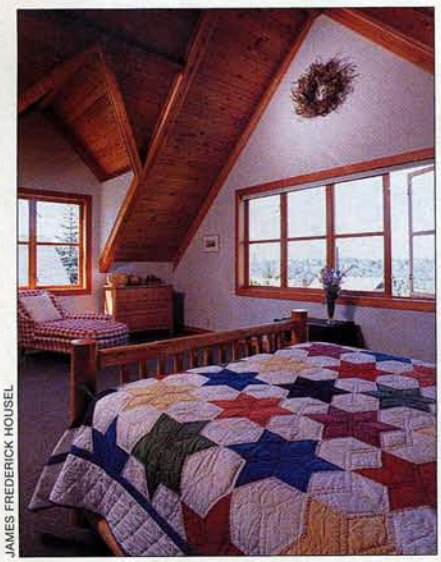






ILLUSTRATIONS BY DEBRA LAMBERT

A BLACK GRANITE COUNTER SEPARATES THE NEW KITCHEN FROM THE DINING–FAMILY ROOM. IN THE MASTER BEDROOM (BELOW), THE CEILING VAULTS TO THE NEW SECOND-STORY ROOFLINE.



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trim. We hired subcontractors for tile, rough plumbing, taping and mudding, and some finish carpentry, like hanging the doors. We made it habitable over the next two years."

Once rooms on the new floor were livable, Mary and Ray moved the kitchen to where they had originally envisioned that it would go—into the back bedroom from the first addition. They installed pipes, vents, and drains to make the upstairs bathroom usable, but did not complete it until they had the money "to finish it right." Custom tile, fixtures, and other finishes are now in place.

Where are they now? "We're down to finishing up trim work," Ray says.

Did the house stay true to its original expansion concept? "Our macro decisions have held, but we've made adjustments and rearrangements as we've gone," he says.

And Mary and Ray have pointers for would-be remodelers. "Get away when the big work is being done," Ray says. "When the floors were being finished, the house was being painted, and when big plumbing was going in, we went to the beach."

Mary suggests that if you're going to live in partially finished spaces, put down carpeting as soon as possible. "Get the carpet down and you'll feel like the space is habitable," she says.

Their paramount advice is to have fun in the process. "I'll always remember the Thanksgiving dinner we had upstairs while it was still just studs," Ray says. "Construction lights, Christmas lights—it was magical."