



UPWARD MOBILITY

AIA HOME OF THE MONTH A family added a second floor to their bungalow to stay in a place they love.

By LAURIE JUNKER
Special to the Star Tribune

Situated on a sunny corner lot across the street from an elementary school and grassy field, Anna Mason's and Kevin Kniebel's 1924 two-bedroom house in Minneapolis' Howe neighborhood served the couple well for 10 years.

They were attached, even as the space began to feel pinched. "Both our children were born in this house, so we had a lot of motivation to try and figure out how to stay," Kniebel said.

The couple decided to consult an architect after seeing the positive experience Mason's parents had working with one on their cabin.

"We wanted the expertise, artistry and partnership an architect would provide. We were really just exploring the art of the possible at first," Mason said.

They talked to a few practitioners before choosing Christopher Strom and Eric Johnson of Christopher Strom Architects. Mason and Kniebel liked their modern style and intuitive and collaborative approach.

"Chris and Eric made us feel comfortable about what were essentially hypothetical

See **AIA** on H6 ▶



Photos by ALYSSA LEE

About this project

Designing firm: Christopher Strom Architects.

Project team: Lead/principal architect Christopher Strom, AIA; associate principal architect Eric Johnson, AIA.

Project partners: General contractor, Resonate Homes; interior design, InUnison Design; structural engineer, Bunkers & Associates.

AIA Home of the Month's winner by Christopher Strom Architects is in south Minneapolis. Homeowner Kevin Kniebel played his banjo in an upstairs addition.

HOMEGAIZING

Charmer checks plenty of boxes

Location, lot size, interior details, updates all add up.

By NANCY NGO
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When Tim and Kathy Keehn came across a Tudor in southwest Minneapolis, it was just what they were looking for — a spacious place to raise their kids and later downsize when the children were grown. In fact, the house was more than they could have wished for.

"It looked like a fairy-tale book," Kathy said. "And it had a bit of a bigger lot, and we had two young sons at the time, so we knew we wanted a lot of

play space. And I loved how I was going to be able to garden."

After more than 20 years, and with their sons now grown, they've listed the four-bedroom, three-bath house spanning more than 3,000 square feet.

Listing agent Matt Engen said the house, built in 1936, offers plenty of charm, including a stone wood-burning fireplace and sunroom. He added that the property is rare.

"The lots in that particular area are wider than most," Engen said. "And 'it's on one of those 'Home Alone'-type blocks where all the houses are pretty attractive."

A perfect fit

Kathy said the house has served them well. The location, within walking distance of Kenny Elementary and Anthony Middle schools, couldn't have been more convenient when their kids were growing up. The sizable lot offered plenty of room for various activities.

"We have a pretty big driveway with a basketball hoop, so all the neighborhood kids would be over playing basketball," Kathy said. "And the patio was a great place to entertain."

Inside also offered ideal spaces for hang time, from the

See **HOMEGAIZING** on H3 ▶



Spacecrafting

This Tudor in southwest Minneapolis sits on a rare wide lot, said listing agent Matt Engen. "It's on one of those 'Home Alone'-type blocks where all the houses are pretty attractive," he added.



Photos by ALYSSA LEE

With the exception of adding a bump-out for a banquette and window, the kitchen makeover was primarily aesthetic to keep costs down while making the space cohesive with changes to the rest of the house, including a new U-shaped staircase between the kitchen and living room. For more photos of this project, visit startribune.com/homegarden.

‘POP THE TOP’ TO ADD SPACE

◀ **AIA** from HI and very expensive decisions,” Kniebel said. The logical solution was to go up — add a second story

and put the bedrooms there to ease congestion on the first floor. Strom was confident they could do it with minimal impact on the main floor

to save money and leave the home’s original cove moldings in the living and dining rooms intact during construction. The project, called “Pop the

Top,” is a 2023-2024 Star Tribune AIA Minnesota Home of the Month winner.

the ground to support the existing foundation and increase its load-bearing capacity.

banquette with a window that Johnson devised, the results are transforming.

Missing tooth

Job one was to find a place for the new staircase that wouldn’t mess up the main floor layout. Fortunately, the home’s existing design presented the perfect spot — a recessed area on the south side between the kitchen and living room, a “missing tooth” where Strom could plug in a U-shaped staircase.

Even better, it didn’t require new foundation walls because the staircase framing could span from side to side between the existing walls. Strom also put a large picture window over the staircase and two smaller square windows near the lower landing, to take advantage of the southern exposure and brighten the entire house.

He had hoped the existing foundation could support a second floor, but a structural engineer told them otherwise.

“The old house had a foundation but no footings, so we couldn’t add more weight without having the house settle,” Strom said.

The team solved the problem with helical piers — steel shafts with blades drilled into

Increasing scope

The refreshed kitchen wasn’t part of the original plans, although it was discussed. Nevertheless, after the builder, Scott Stankey of Resonate Homes, finished framing the staircase and second story, he asked Mason and Kniebel one more time if they’d like to reconsider.

The couple saw how the rest of the house was being transformed and decided to go for it. Johnson was happy to draw up a design quickly.

“Projects like this are big undertakings and it’s not uncommon for clients to increase the scope once they see what’s required, so they don’t have to go through it again,” he said.

Kniebel agreed. “It was a 1970s kitchen. We knew the house would feel more cohesive if we did it.”

They kept costs down by leaving the plumbing where it was, keeping the existing flooring and even sourcing a few windows at the ReUse Store. And although the changes are primarily aesthetic, save a small, cantilevered bump-out

Laundry closet

In addition to three bedrooms, one bath and a laundry room on the new second floor, there’s a gathering space where the family hangs out before bed, reads together and Kniebel, a banjo player, sometimes strums.

He and Mason skipped an ensuite for themselves in favor of a sizable shared bathroom with a separate wet room for the toilet and shower so family members can use it simultaneously. In another unconventional choice, the couple put their closet in the new laundry room across the hall from their bedroom.

“It seemed like a practical solution,” Kniebel said. “Certainly makes putting away clothes easier.”

Laurie Junker is a Twin Cities-based writer specializing in home design and architecture.

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