

HOME / renovation

Redoing it right

Mother of five oversees massive work to improve 1910 Conyers home but maintain its character

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Five months after Amy and Andy Brown began soliciting bids from potential contractors to renovate their historic Conyers home, they were no closer to hiring someone than when they started.

The bids varied widely — from a low of \$120,000 to a high of \$580,000 — and the Browns weren't impressed with anyone they met.

"That's when we decided we would just do it ourselves," says Amy Brown.

And so they have.

Since April, Amy Brown, a homemaker and mother of five, has been the principal contractor overseeing the massive renovations on her family's future home, while her husband works as a financial planner.

"I'm not afraid of it," says Brown. "It saves money."

Renovating any home can turn it into a money pit, but it's particularly true when the house is in a historic district, as the Browns' is.

"From the moment I went in it, I felt it had a lot of happiness in it, and I just love this area of town. It's just really revitalizing with young families," says Brown, 39, who grew up in the neighborhood but moved away as an adult.

The couple wanted to maintain the integrity of the Arts and Crafts bungalow, built in 1910, keep the original façade and build additions to accommodate their children, who range in age from 4 to 10.

First, make a plan

To pull it off, the Browns hired Cynthia Karegeannes, an architect with CMK Designs in Norcross, who was recommended by a friend and who specializes in bringing old homes back to life.

"It's made all the difference in the world," notes Brown. "Because she's a mother and a woman, she knew all the needs of a family."

At their initial meeting, the Browns talked



Cynthia Karegeannes

The Browns' historic Conyers home before renovations began.

with Karegeannes about their lifestyle and what they wanted in the home. Amy Brown even had photos from magazines that pictured what they were looking for. At subsequent meetings, Karegeannes presented sketches and images that captured the Browns' vision. She and Amy Brown are in close contact, talking almost every day and meeting at the job site several times a week to make sure the project is on track.

"Watching them as they've approached the project, they've done a good job," Karegeannes says. "They're very organized."

"The most positive thing they did," she adds, "was to know that they needed a good plan for the project before they started anything."

Having a plan was critical. Since the home is in a historic area, the Browns needed to have it approved by the Old Town Conyers Historic District before they could obtain building permits. The review panel looks at architectural features, building materials, landscaping and other elements to make sure the character of the home is not compromised.

"Typically, the review process is about a four-week process," says Karegeannes. "If you're organized, you can have it done concurrently with other components of the work. We had a good feeling we were following their guidelines."

Keeping it historic

After purchasing the home from the family of the second owner, who had lived in the house for 40 years, Amy Brown did her homework.

She went online to find out what homes looked like during that period, so they could maintain the integrity during the renovation.



The Brown kids put their handprints in cement during the renovation. The remodel kept family life very much in mind.

"My husband really wanted to maintain the original windows," notes Brown.

They ended up replacing them with insulated windows to make the home energy-efficient, but they managed to find a style with the same grid pattern as the original panes.

"I like the fact that the windows are the true pane glass. It was an expensive thing to do, but it was worth it," she says.

The Browns also preserved the character of the home by maintaining the roofline when they enlarged the attic gables. The original mint-green tile in the first-floor bath will stay, even though the bathroom will be enlarged and updated. The original heart pine floors will be refurbished. The additions also will have wood

Amy Brown (left) and **Cynthia Karegeannes** talk and/or meet several times a week to make sure things are on track. As the contractors, the Browns are responsible for hiring and supervising the subcontractors who do the work. "We have really been fortunate. Everyone has been wonderful," says Amy Brown.



Photos by JOEY IVANSCO / Staff



flooring.

"I'm contemplating using reclaimed heart pine so it will match. I do not like carpet," notes Brown.

To modernize the home, the Browns raised the attic roof 18 inches and added windows to create upstairs living space for their children that will include three large bedrooms, three full baths and a playground.

On the main level, a gourmet kitchen will be installed with a butler's pantry, kitchen island and breakfast bar that overlooks a new family room. They are also adding two laundry rooms (one for the adults, one upstairs for the kids), a

► Please see 30

New, insulated windows and cedar shake shingles were added to the front of the house, but the façade is basically the same.