

# MANSION GLOBAL

A Remodel, Nearly Derailed by the Pandemic, Brought This 118-Year-Old New York House Into the Next Century. Check out the Before and After.

Architect-owner Lisa Schwert transformed a 1905 colonial into a functional family home, motivating her to launch her own firm

By Tracy Kaler

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Photo: Tory Williams

When Lisa Schwert embarked on her old house renovation in Pelham, New York, she wanted to create a functional family home without sacrificing character—unaware that a global pandemic would upend her plans.

“We had appliances installed, but no countertops or working sink in the kitchen for the entirety of the shutdown,” she recalled.

Schwert refers to herself as a serial remodeler because of the countless renovations she’s tackled over the years, both for herself and loved ones. But revitalizing the Pelham house, a 5,000 square-foot Arts-and-Crafts-era stucco Colonial, was unique because it had “beautiful proportions and details,” affirming her affection for historic homes.

“I think it’s fascinating to understand the evolution of how people lived in a house during different periods in history,” Schwert said.



AFTER: The primary bath

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For the central staircase, Schwert kept the original chandelier and built-in window seat. (Photo: Tory Williams)

The six-month “surgical renovation,” as Schwert called it, included reworking the house’s north side and removing a back staircase to create space for the reimagined, eat-in kitchen.

“It was gratifying to take what was kind of an unlivable and inefficient area of the house, and with some strategic space planning and relatively minor architectural shifts, completely transform the way the house functioned,” she explained.

Schwert used unlacquered brass, Danby marble, and Calacatta Vagli marble, all finishes that will patina and complement the age of the home. Added amenities included a steam oven, radiant heat in the bathrooms, a steam shower and a midnight kitchen in the primary suite. She said the perks were “all things that made the home feel luxurious to live in but didn’t detract from its historical character.”



The original staircase

**We describe our aesthetic as...** Thoughtful, natural and collected.

**The biggest lesson we learned from the renovation was...** To be flexible and keep an open mind. The pandemic threw us a major curveball, and we had no choice but to roll with the punches, which is a valuable approach in any renovation.

**The one tip I’d offer to someone undertaking a renovation is...** Have a good plan but don’t let it stress you out when things inevitably change. Renovating a home, especially an older one, can be a complex and imperfect process.

**My biggest surprise was...** The global pandemic. But we were able to navigate it with the help of committed contractors and vendors.

**My favorite room after the renovation is...** The kitchen. We reconfigured it to incorporate a servery with a 108-bottle wine refrigerator, prep sink, second dishwasher off the dining room, an eat-in breakfast nook and a chef’s kitchen with a large waterfall island.

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Schwert added a midnight kitchen in the primary suite's vestibule.  
(Photo: Tory Williams)

**The most dramatic change is...** The primary suite. We reconfigured two small bedrooms and a bathroom renovated in the 1980s into a luxurious primary suite with a five-fixture bathroom, a midnight kitchen and a walk-in closet.

**The one element we kept was...** Terracotta tile. The kitchen had this beautiful terracotta tile that had seen a lot of life but was completely timeless, with a gorgeous patina and variation you could never recreate with new materials.

**We decided to renovate instead of building a new home because...** I enjoy working out how to make an older home function for a modern family without losing the character that makes it unique.

**The renovation ended up costing...** About \$400,000. Though, we got a lot of value thanks to our trade relationships.