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star tribune/aia everyday solutions

Everyday Solutions appears once a month in the Homes section as a showcase for projects, by AIA Minnesota member architects, that solve a homeowner's everyday design challenge. The program is a partnership between the Star Tribune and the Minnesota chapter of the American Institute of Architects.



A fabricator used the design found in a historic catalog as a guide.

Everyday solutions

A restored fireplace brings historic flair back to a century-old living room.

By LYNN UNDERWOOD • lynn.underwood@startribune.com

The challenge: Derek Gjerde and Allison Hoffman bought a grand Tudor Revival home on St. Paul's Summit Avenue. The house still boasted original handsome woodwork and architectural details. But the living room's plain-Jane fireplace, which had been "modernized" with wallboard and a marble slab, was all wrong for the century-old room. "It really stuck out among the detailed carved woodwork," said Gjerde. "We suspected there was something significant hidden underneath because it's the focal point in the living room and the only fireplace in this house."

The design team:

Architect Mark Nelson and designer Brad Belka, David Heide Design Studio, Minneapolis, 612-337-5060, www.dhdstudio.com.



Mark Nelson

mantel spanning the original pilasters, as well as oak paneling to frame the bas relief artwork. "It was inspired by the heavily detailed cabinetry and casework in the rest of the house," said Nelson.

The solution: Tear out the wallboard and marble and restore the fireplace to its early-20th-century beauty. "We wanted to restore the dignity of the remarkable room," said Nelson. "And leave the fireplace looking like it was original to the house."

Buried treasure: Gjerde pried off a piece of wallboard with a crowbar and uncovered a plaster bas relief panel above the fireplace. It was damaged, chipped and had been painted gold. "We were excited, because it looked original," said Gjerde.

Nelson enlisted a St. Paul fabricator to restore the antique panel, depicting a scene from Greek mythology. "The fabricator found the actual piece in one of their historic catalogs for \$5," said Nelson. "They were able to reproduce it, using that image."

Fireplace facelift: When Nelson's crew tore off all the marble and wallboard, they discovered the original floor-to-ceiling brick facade. Many of the bricks were damaged. "The mason came up with the bright idea to remove the bricks, turn them around and expose the back side," said Nelson. "But it was quite an effort to take it all out, clean it and place it all back together."

Stylish surround: Since there wasn't enough salvageable brick for the top part of the fireplace, Belka designed a quartersawn white oak

Historic hearth: After they removed the marble slab, "we could see the imprint of the original hearth tile," said Nelson. "We put in red quarry tile that matches the tile in the front porch of the house."

Period lighting: Gjerde found antique brass sconces on eBay that are similar to original fixtures in the house. They were rewired and restored and positioned higher on the pilasters to highlight the bas relief.

The result: "The restored fireplace is not highfalutin elegant," said Nelson. "It's calm, staid and reserved and blends beautifully with the rest of the house."

Dignity restored: The Gerde-Hoffman family uses the room as a music practice space and sitting room. The final step is the installation of custom fireplace doors. "Now the room looks and feels like the way we believe it was meant to be," said Gjerde.

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SHARE YOUR EVERYDAY SOLUTION

Everyday Solutions features projects by AIA Minnesota member architects that solve a homeowner's everyday design challenge. To submit a project for consideration, please send uncompressed JPEG images of the element or space, before and after photos and a brief description of the story behind the project to Angie McKinley: mckinley@aia-mn-org



Provided photos

Mark Nelson took cues from other rooms to design a fireplace that looks like it was always part of the 1912 home.



BEFORE: Demolition of the existing fireplace's drywall and marble slab, left, revealed the original brick facade and plaster bas relief panel, right.