

remarkable makeovers

Homeowners
opt for fresh,
updated looks
with big impact

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The 1980s are alive and well in some Cary homes.

But rather than leg warmers and Walkmans, these homes bear certain other 1980s hallmarks, like floral wallpaper and off-white appliances, or small kitchens with dark wood cabinets and the occasional decorative wood beam running through the family room ceiling. Red brick fireplace walls. Tiny windows and choppy floor plans.

However, there comes a time when homeowners decide to ditch the Rubik's Cubes — or their interior design equivalent, the wood paneling in the family room — and move their homes into the modern era.

Ripe for updates

Home renovation is a big business in an area that saw triple-digit population and housing unit growth in the 1970s and 1980s. According to the census, Cary grew from 7,430 people in 1970 to more than 40,000 by the late 1980s, and new home construction kept up proportionally. Those decades also birthed some of the area's most coveted — and convenient — neighborhoods, like Cary's Lochmere and McGregor Downs, and Apex's Buckingham. Partly because of their location, and partly because of their larger lot sizes and mature hardwood trees, such neighborhoods see more than their share of homeowners who choose to stay and remodel rather than move.

"Not only do older neighborhoods have more to offer," said Wallace Baker of Trendmark Inc., "but you can often add on to your house for less than new construction."

That's exactly what Donna and Scott Roberts found out. They loved the location of their 1989 Lochmere home, but they wanted something brighter and more flowing than their first floor, where walls divided the space into individual rooms, including a formal living room and an informal family room.

"We live on the lake in Lochmere," said Scott Roberts. "It's a beautiful site, a very private site. We looked around and then decided to spend our money on our own home."

Opening things up

Enlisting the services of Quality Design & Construction Inc., the couple knocked out all of the downstairs walls, combining the entire floor into one large open space and creating an unobstructed view of the lake. They refaced their brick fireplace with distressed cherry and designed built-in cabinets for a custom entertainment center with a big-screen TV. They did, however, keep one touch of age: 130-year-old heartwood pine flooring throughout the first floor. The kitchen is now outfitted in marble and granite



▲ BREAKFAST ROOM AFTER

Left, the kitchen of the Roberts' 1989 Lochmere home features typical features of the period including a fluorescent light box, floral wallpaper and dark wood trim. Above and below are the Roberts' kitchen and breakfast area after a remodel by Quality Design and Construction Inc.

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◀ KITCHEN BEFORE

▼ KITCHEN AFTER



MAKEOVER

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with commercial-grade appliances.

They couldn't be happier about the changes. "We love it," said Scott Roberts. "It came out just as we had planned it."

Lighter and brighter

Updating homes from the 70s and 80s is all about making them lighter and brighter, said Dave Mackowski, president of Quality Design & Construction, a full service design/build contractor that does everything from single room to whole-house renovations.

Lightening and brightening in many homes means taking out walls like the Roberts did to free up unused space. "Homeowners are looking to get rid of formal spaces," said Mackowski. "They have them, they have furniture in them, but they're not using them."

In kitchens, this means tearing down the once-popular fluorescent tube fixtures and replacing them with inset can lights and under-cabinet lighting. Other popular updates are installing stainless steel appliances, granite or Corian countertops and cabinets in light woods.

Function and features

Flow and function were afterthoughts 20 and 30 years ago, said Mackowski. "Now we're looking at features and functions."

Some of the sleekest features are found in bathrooms. Homeowners who renovate are choosing double-head or handheld showers, clear glass or tiled shower stalls, 12-inch ceramic tiles in light colors, and even heated tile floors.

Bathrooms — along with kitchens — are the most financially prudent rooms of the house to remodel, offering an 85-95 percent return on investment, said John Sperath, owner of Blue Ribbon Residential Construction.

"If you talk to a Realtor, what sells a house first is curb appeal, but the second and third reasons are kitchen and bathrooms," he

said.

As for that all-important curb appeal, homeowners are tearing off the original vinyl siding and upgrading to fiber cement siding, often known as Hardiplank. In some cases, exterior improvement goes hand-in-hand with interior renovation as homeowners strip their homes down to minimal square footage in preparation for additions.

Or, homeowners can just paint or replace the front door for an instant improvement.

Other easy do-it-yourself improvements include sanding down the old dark-stain trim of 1980s houses and giving it a lighter look, and replacing old sheet-vinyl kitchen or bathroom floors with tile.

But sometimes, homeowners aren't as concerned about the latest and greatest features and functions. Sometimes they want something else.

Louise and Carl Zorowski added 200 square feet to their kitchen by extending it by 1.5 feet. They also added a sunroom off the kitchen and put in a new floor and cooktop. Louise Zorowski's reason for renovating was simple: She wanted her husband closer.

"Usually he would leave and go to the study after meals," she said, "but now he can sit and read the newspaper and still be part of what's going on in the kitchen."



Above, the Roberts combined a formal living room and informal family room to create one large, open great room. Below, the family room and formal living room before the remodel.

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