

# Rebirth through Renovation:

## The Tale of a McCall Craftsman



By Dixie Johnson

Original owners of house, Dale and Gladys Fickel talking with neighbors, 1959.

*It's a familiar story—the ugly duckling transforms into a beautiful swan—except in this case it's a house we're talking about. Built in 1947 and perched above the river, it was one of the first houses on McCall's Mather Road. In 1993, when Steve and Patricia Minor were interested in seeing it, however, realtors were reluctant to show it because it needed so much work.*



Left: Living room looking into kitchen at the Minor's house. Books help decorate a railing for the loft in the upper left corner. Right: Original living room and kitchen in early 1950s.



"It originally looked like a chicken coop and although listed as a three bedroom, it really had only one bedroom and a loft," remembers Steve. The original owner, Dale Fickel, got so tired of people commenting on his ugly cabin, that in its defense he put a sign out in front of the house that read, "I don't like your house either." But the Minors saw the place as a happy house that had been loved, and even though "it rained more inside the house than outside," they believed they could help it come alive. Since then, the husband and wife team has transformed that chicken coop into a graceful and comfortable Bungalow style home.

Representing the third generation in a family of designers and builders, Steve started working for his father and grandfather when he was just 10 years old. Patricia has a background in interior design, so as equal partners in their business, McCall Craftsman Homes Inc., they were well suited to take on the renovation and expansion of the little cabin. They felt it had good bones, and wanted to retain its character.

When creating a new addition, Steve believes the trick is to make sure the new blends with the old. As a result, their design has a wonderful sense of continuity. In the process of renovating the house, the Minors have kept many of the original elements — such as the brick fireplace and the larch floors—but have incorporated a mantel made from an original window header. About 10 feet has been added on to each end of the cabin, the house has been extended by four feet in front to create a galleria that overlooks the generous deck. Yet another addition provides a dining area complete with a window seat overlooking a water feature. An enlarged kitchen is highlighted by vaulted ceilings that soar to the roof. Two glue-lam beams break up the height and give character to the room as well as hide discrete work-area lighting. Laundry and powder rooms are also new additions to the cabin.

Slate floors in the new sections echo the slate surround on the fireplace, with the material repeated on the kitchen

counter-tops and backsplash. Steve used original wood paneling taken from the walls to make cabinet doors and drawers in the kitchen, and he finished them with Craftsman-style beading detail. Patricia mixed stains to match the old wood as closely as possible and completed the transformation with an umber tinted varnish. Above the kitchen stove is a colorful glazed tile mural with a dark green background. Patricia created unity by staining some of the cabinets in a similar color.

An island that Steve built between the kitchen and the dining area reflects Patricia's belief that an island should provide a connection between rooms rather than be a divider; consequently, her divider is open underneath, and, to emphasize the connection between rooms, it employs the beading technique used throughout the kitchen. This detail also recurs on the doorframes that Steve created from more of the old wood paneling. The loft has been retained and is now used as the couple's business office. Bookshelves serve as a safety rail and provide privacy.

When asked what difficulties they encountered in the renovation process, Patricia says with a chuckle, "We don't see difficulties! We see opportunities for creative solutions."

This attitude is illustrated in a new addition to their garden, where three large evergreens had to be removed. The Minors cut the stumps down to 10 to 15 feet and had a sculptor carve the faces of Gandolf, Galadriel (characters from "The Lord of the Rings"), and Dumbledore (from the "Harry Potter" series) into them. The choice of characters reflects the feeling of a fantasy-like retreat. Plants such as columbines, forget-me-nots and lamiums offer old-fashioned enchantment and seclusion. Patricia has created several areas that feature small sculptures—a child sitting and reading in a shady nook, and fairies and gnomes that rest near a waterfall

Original house 1947.



1993 when the Minors bought the house.



*"A house is a living being — each one has its own character, and if you listen, the house will tell you what it wants."*



Modern day Minor house.



1994, tearing out the front wall of the house, hundreds of 2 x 4's were found behind the paneling.



1962, original owners Dale and Gladys Fickle washing storm windows.

or under a bush. A sculpture of Don Quixote—that icon of whimsical dreamers—guards them all. A river-rock façade on the garage enhances the naturalism; a water feature complete with tiny waterfall and brook was recently added to complete an atmosphere of tranquility. The Minors' garden has not escaped the eye of the community and was included on a garden tour held July 2007 to raise money for the Snowdon Wildlife Sanctuary.

Although the Minors specialize in Craftsman-style homes, they do not limit themselves to this particular style of architecture. Craftsman homes are built with natural, sustainable materials used in a simple and functional manner. "We're a different kind of business because we are involved in the designing and building process from the spark of an idea provided by future homeowners, to the moment we hand them the key to the finished home." Patricia adds, "We are so lucky because we're doing what we love and we get to see the end result."

Steve and Patricia have lived in McCall for 14 years and in that time have built about 60 homes. Of those, only four have since changed hands—a testament to the thoroughness of their research in designing each home for the individual owner.

By getting to know each family and its individual needs, the Minors are able to better design homes for their clients. After the potential homeowner has chosen a building site, the Minors examine particulars such as view corridors and exposures for both winter and summer. Steve then draws a preliminary design after which they meet with the client and move forward. As a result of Steve's rather rigorous preparations, in most cases finished designs are subject to very few changes. Minor is a member of the American

Institute of Building Design, an organization for people who design homes. In his design process, Steve hand draws a detailed plan that shows various elevations as well as floor plans. Elements such as shakes, stonework and other exterior details are clearly illustrated.

Every project has its limitations which are based on size, budget and shape of the lot—each of which creates restrictions. "But because of these parameters, we learn to think outside the box," Steve says. "We look at alternatives and it allows us to be creative." He credits Patricia for bringing the woman's point of view to the table. Besides being a talented interior designer, she encourages couples to compromise in their choices.

What clients may not realize is that while they are interviewing the Minors for a potential job, the Minors are interviewing them as well. "It is important that we all feel we can work together as a team. We're too old not to have fun doing this," Patricia says with a smile.

The Minors tell their clients to avoid choosing too many products at the outset of a job. Many people have trouble visualizing what something will look like and tend to make decisions too soon. "Each house has a different set of parameters depending on the view, location and lay of the land, and you must pause and be quiet long enough to hear what the house is saying."

Sometimes it takes living in a house that Steve and Patricia have designed before clients truly come to appreciate their work. The Minors' philosophy echoes the values of a craftsman: "A house is a living being—each one has its own character, and if you listen, the house will tell you what it wants." ■



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