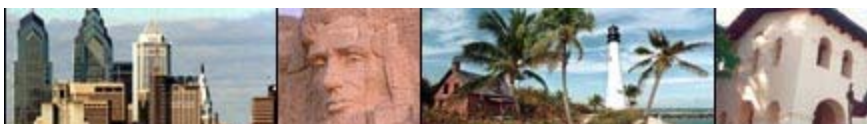




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### Just a small bump-out pays large dividends in rowhouses

*Eils Lotozo INQUIRER STAFF WRITER*

Philadelphia rowhouse owners who feel cramped and in need of more space typically add on to the back of their dwellings.

But Spring Garden residents Craig Smith and Michele Frank did something rarely seen in the realm of rowhouse additions: They expanded sideways.

By bumping out 3 1/2 feet into the side alley that separates the rear section of their home from that of their neighbors', the couple transformed their narrow first floor into a bright and spacious domain with front-to-back views and the modern kitchen of their dreams.

"In sheer numbers, 3 1/2 feet doesn't sound like such a big deal, but it is," Frank says. "Our house feels so much bigger."

Though the couple gained just 100 square feet, this was one bold and complicated project, involving the calculations of a structural engineer, the installation of massive steel beams, and the buy-in of the couple next door.

Only that last part was easy.

In fact, it was neighbors Anne Cook and Russ Troyer who had originally brought up the idea, years earlier, of transforming the sliver of side yard between their houses, used by most rowhouse dwellers for trash cans and central air-conditioning units, into living space. But it wasn't until Frank, a former college English instructor, and Smith, an executive recruiter and consultant, had their second child that their home began to feel like a tight fit.

Not only was the house unusually narrow, a previous owner's renovation that had opened up the first floor featured a strange kitchen layout that stretched from one end of the house to the other.

"It wasn't efficient," Frank says. "We didn't have a proper living room or a proper dining room."

While searching for a new house, though, they realized there was much they liked about where they lived. They decided to approach Cook and Troyer about the addition scheme.

"I've been wanting to do this for 25 years," says Cook, who quickly agreed to a joint construction project that would create additions for both families.

Each couple worked with separate architects, but one construction firm, Hanson General Contracting, did the building, and one structural engineer, Skip Popoli, devised the system of steel beams and posts crucial to holding up the houses once the original sections of first-floor exterior wall were removed.

"There were some scary moments," John Hanson says of the project, which required a zoning variance. Chief among them: removing the enormous expanse of original brick wall after the beams were put in place.

"You try to do it systematically, but once it's free-standing, there is a chance for that wall just to fall over," he says.

Fortunately, it didn't.

With no rear access to the houses, a team of workers had to carry all the support posts and beams in through the front doors. The dirt from excavating the new foundations also had to be carried out through the front doors in buckets and wheelbarrows.

Cook and Troyer have not yet finished their interior work. Smith and Frank moved back into their house in November, after a total renovation of the first floor that took six months.

"There was a real advantage to both of [the families] doing it at the same time," says architect **Kevin Rasmussen**, who with his partner, Vivian Su, designed Smith and Frank's reconfigured first floor, which uses the exposed steel beams as a design focal point. "The concept was they would share all the costs, from concrete to masonry to steel."

In the end, construction of the two copper-roofed, skylighted additions, not including any internal finish work, totaled more than \$90,000, split by the two couples.

A considerable expense, but one that bought a big impact, **Rasmussen** says.

"Because we knew it would be expensive, we wanted to make sure Craig and Michele got good value for the money. So we did 10 different plans, five with the original footprint of the house and five with the expanded one. It was amazing how many options opened up with that addition."

Besides more space and light (from those skylights and a new window on the end wall of the addition), the couple got the powder room and coatroom they had always wanted. The project also created an open staircase to a new basement playroom for the couple's children, ages 5 and 19 months.

"We really wanted to get the television and all the toys out of the living room," Frank says.

Also gained in the renovation: a well-defined gracious dining room and a comfortable living room that looks out into the garden.

But what Frank really loves about the change is the expansive new kitchen, with its Shaker-style maple cabinets, black- granite-topped island and breakfast bar, and six-burner Wolf range.

"This is not a show kitchen," she says. "Craig and I really cook."

Such a kitchen wouldn't have been possible without the width brought about by the addition, Frank says.

"Craig and I just love our house now. It's just what we envisioned."

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**Illustration:PHOTO**

LAURENCE KESTERSON / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Michele Frank says she and her husband, Craig Smith, above, love their new kitchen, part of an addition, left, done with Spring Garden rowhouse neighbors Anne Cook and Russ Troyer.

Halkin Architectural Photography

Besides widening the kitchen, the addition gave the Frank-Smith home extra dining room space and views from front to back. They also put in a powder room, a coatroom, and a basement playroom.

LAURENCE KESTERSON / Inquirer Staff Photographer

The exposed steel beam used in the sideways expansion of adjoining Spring Garden rowhouses is a focal point now in the home owned by Michele Frank and Craig Smith.

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