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AOL Keyword: Southern Living

Raising the Roof

This Florida family turned an understated 1950s house into an appealing home.



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When the homeowners bought this 1957 concrete block rancher, they were confronted with a house that had a flat roof, an outdoor laundry room connected by a carport, and sparse, neglected landscaping. Now updated with a new hipped roof, enlarged windows, and an enclosed garage, this transformed home sits comfortably within its lush Florida surroundings.

Consider this statement: The potential of remodeling lies in the eye of the homeowner. Paul Gidus can attest to its truth. When his family moved into a shady Orlando neighborhood, they chose a house that didn't appear ideal. Built in 1957, the concrete block structure contained an outdoor laundry room connected by a carport, and it was surrounded by neglected landscaping. The most noticeable "feature" was a flat roof that gave the house a boxlike look. "Although we found it in rundown condition," Paul says, "the house's structure was sound, and its location is in an up-and-coming area of Orlando."

Settling upon gutting and updating the place, the Giduses turned to residential designer Ray Wolters for help. Because Paul and his brother, Stephen, operate a local construction firm, Paul served as builder.

One of the first and most dramatic decisions involved the addition of a hipped roof. Positioned at a pleasing 6 and 12 slope (a 6-inch distance up for every foot across, resulting in a 30-degree rafter pitch), the new roof transforms the home's appearance. Paul and Ray chose to keep the wide cornice of the existing housetop. This element, along with the elevated roofline, gives the house a definite cap.

The concrete block walls worked with the renovation as well. Attaching a metal lathe to the exterior, Paul applied coats of stucco to create a smooth, durable finish that conceals the mortar joints. Where new, ample windows replaced the original units, the homeowner and his construction team enlarged the block openings and added half-round stucco sills.

Next, Paul enclosed the carport and outdoor laundry room, turning

this space into a garage. With the area now inside, the Giduses can protect their cars from the humid Florida climate and have storage for bikes, skateboards, and toys.

The front yard, especially the main entrance, likewise underwent needed improvements. In place of the existing concrete walk, pale brick pavers form a meandering path to the front door and stoop. Lush plantings of viburnum, ferns, and boxwoods line the path. This area, along with the covered entry, allows the couple to visit with neighbors while keeping an eye on their three kids at play.

Paul offers solid advice to homeowners planning big changes: "Hire a professional remodeler and designer to help you create a place that will agree with your living needs." Looking at his home's transformation, who could argue?

ROBERT MARTIN