

# Chicago Tribune

## Hold the wrecking ball

*A decrepit bungalow undergoes a dramatic transformation into a show home*

*[Chicago Final Edition]*

*Feb 22, 2007*

*(Copyright 2007 by the Chicago Tribune)*

This mission was not exactly rocket science--at least not compared to what's done at the Kennedy Space Center just east of here. But the job was daunting and loaded with potential pitfalls. The monumental challenge: Move a decrepit 1909 house to another lot and then double it in size and transform it into a sparkling show home--all in just eight months.

The extreme makeover had to be perfect, because it would be judged by 100,000 home builders in town for their annual convention.

Located in the Lake Eola Heights Historic District near downtown Orlando, the tired old house was valued at \$325,000 before its rebirth. Now it's on the market for \$3.15 million. Truly, this was a renovation on steroids. Sponsored by the National Council of the Housing Industry, a committee of the National Association of Home Builders, and Builders Magazine, a New American Home is built every year in the city where the International Builders' Show is held. The purpose is to demonstrate cutting-edge construction, technology and design.

But this year conventioners won a daily double--the New American Home plus the Renewed American Home, the remodeled bungalow, were open for inspection from Feb. 6 to 10. The homes now are open to the public on weekends through Sunday.

Besides the remodeling, the 2,462-square-foot house was expanded to 5,860 square feet with four bedrooms and 5 1/2 baths. It boasts 7,175 square feet under roof when the detached garage with overhead apartment is included. Although Winter Park, Fla., builder PSG Construction more than doubled the size of the original house, the original roof line with three gables is still in tact. That's because the additional square footage comes mostly from a rear addition and the finished basement.

Technology only dreamed about in 1909 is now built in, including security and life-safety systems, structured wiring and multizone audio and lighting controls.

Before the renovation, the survival of the 1909 house was in doubt. Definitely showing its age, the bungalow had most recently been converted for office use.

The non-descript house was a candidate for the wrecking ball. It stood at the corner of Broadway Avenue and Ridgewood Street in a neighborhood of houses with a median price of about \$600,000. Across nearby Lake Eola, high-rise condos go for \$1 million-plus.

Builder Carmen Dominguez had bought the three lots on which the house stood for the site of the New American Home, but the Orlando Historic Preservation Board favored saving the old house, according to Stephen Gidus, partner in PSG Construction. The board approved relocating the house from the corner lot, and Dominguez sold the house and one of the other lots to PSG. On the remaining lot, Dominguez built the New American Home.

The first step was to raise the old house off its foundation and move it to the middle of the property so construction could start on the New American Home. The move cost \$38,000.

"One of the most nerve-wracking times during the whole project was lowering the old house onto its new foundation," Gidus said. "Then we had eight months to complete the house. Luckily, we were able to pull it off in a short amount of time.

"There wasn't a whole lot to salvage. We couldn't save the old siding and windows, so they were removed. It actually became a reconstruction or reproduction. We retained the shell, but only about 15 percent of the original structure is left," he said.

The house was gutted to the studs. What was left was just a skeleton of the old house, and that skeleton was fleshed out into the Renewed American Home.

How was that accomplished? "Walls were blown out, spaces opened up, some ceilings raised and this old house with small rooms was transformed for today's lifestyle," said James Lucia, partner in Lucia Kassik & Monday, the Winter Park, Fla., designers of the Renewed American Home.

Lucia described the architectural style as Florida vernacular--a mix of bungalow, craftsman and Victorian. The original roofline with three gables was retained.

From the street, the yellow house with white trim blends perfectly with the surrounding historic neighborhood. It looks like a well-maintained house from an earlier era. By contrast, the New American Home, just 50 feet away, exudes ultra modernism.

The 12 steps up from the street to the renewed home lead to a wide, old-time porch with four rocking chairs, a perfect reminder of its heritage.

The front entry opens into a foyer flanked by the dining room and a library, a traditional layout. But the rest of the first floor explodes into an open floor plan dominated by the totally modern 17- by-14-foot kitchen and the 17-by-26 1/2-foot family room. The first floor also includes a bedroom suite, mudroom, powder room and an elevator. (How many 1909 houses had elevators?)

Upstairs, the master suite includes a bath with a vintage- looking tub with four legs, one of the

few reminders of the past inside the house. Actually, it's not an antique, but a new tub manufactured by Kohler. On the wall above the tub is a flat-screen TV. The upper floor also has two other bedrooms and a morning bar in the hallway that is practically a second kitchen. It includes an undercounter refrigerator, a single-drawer dishwasher and a microwave.

"The basement was another challenge. The original house didn't have one. Basements are not usual in Florida because of the high water table," Gidus said. "But putting in the basement was worth it; it's one of the best features."

Far from an ordinary basement, this one is equipped with a large exercise room with two mirrored walls, a concrete-block safe room as a protection against Florida's potentially dangerous weather, a wine cellar with its own air conditioning and a large flex room that could be used as a second family room.

Outside, a porte cochere was added over the driveway, which leads back to the garage. Cypress siding was used on the front of the house to maintain an authentic historic look, but a composite Georgia Pacific siding is in the rear. "You can't tell the difference between the two, and the composite may never have to be painted," Gidus said.

In the back yard are a brick courtyard and a two-car garage with an efficiency apartment above it. Next to the garage is a covered outdoor living area with fireplace and TV.

It's estimated that the energy efficiency of the rebuilt house will be almost double that of the original.

Although the price of the Renewed American Home is \$3.15 million, Gidus said "the entire package, including furnishings, exercise equipment and 800 bottles of wine would be about \$3.45 million."

Would the builder of the Renewed American Home do anything different?

Gidus joked--in case of an extended emergency--that he might have provided direct access from the safe room into the wine cellar.

### **[Illustration]**

Caption: PHOTOS (color): The 1909 bungalow, last used as office space, had fallen into disrepair. The newly renovated house keeps the original roofline but adds a new expanded porch. The brick-and-stucco steps and porte cochere also are period details. Photo courtesy of PSG Construction (top); Orlando Sentinel photo by Vince Hobbs PHOTO (color): Honey-colored oak floors, white custom millwork, an oversize furniture-style island and warm hues give the sizable, open kitchen and family room addition a traditional feel. Photo courtesy of PSG Construction PHOTO (color): The master bathroom tub looks vintage but is new. A built-in fireplace and a flat-screen TV add a touch of luxury. Orlando Sentinel photo by Vince Hobbs PHOTO (color): The home's full-height basement, a rarity in Florida, includes a family room complete with a mini-kitchen and bar area, a concrete-block safe room and an 800-bottle, conditioned wine cellar.

Photo courtesy of PSG Construction PHOTOS (color): Left: The outdoor entertaining area has remote- control screens for protection against insects. Gaslights are also found throughout the property. Right: A bedroom with a ceiling painted like striped awning.

Orlando Sentinel photos by Vince Hobbs

Credit: By John Handley, Special to the Tribune