

SPRING FASHION ISSUE

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Project featured in this article was designed by
Peter Zimmerman Architects, Inc.
John Toates, AIA was the Principle in Charge
of Design for the project.





Photo: Ben Shein

REBUILDING HISTORY

Local architects merge old and new with seamless, indistinguishable additions to traditional estates

By Amanda Gibney Weko

The Main Line's venerable old houses recall gracious times gone by. Their traditional architecture captures the essence of the last two centuries with elegance and grandeur. It may seem like many of these estates have never been altered — yet there is more new construction than meets the eye. Well-integrated and impeccably detailed additions have been quietly enhancing amenities and square footage. These sensitive projects, perfectly blending old and new, are rendered nearly invisible through old-world craftsmanship and well-considered design.

Peter Zimmerman Architects recently completed one such project: a major addition to a 1935 Tudor-style house in Bryn Mawr. The exterior's intricate brickwork — varying patterns of running and stacked bond, herringbone and soldier-course — is interspersed with half-timbering and complemented by natural stone. Integrating new construction was a challenge, to say the least, says architect Peter Zimmerman, but both he and the homeowners were committed to doing the project right.

For the clients, "right" meant replicating as much of the home's original detail as possible, from the complex exterior brick patterns to the interior millwork. For Zimmerman and principal John Toates, it meant studying the home's original drawings and understanding the proportion and scale of rooms. Both sought a balance between the contemporary living environment the family desired and the more intimate, formal spaces of the original home.

"We retained the hierarchy of rooms and details," explains Zimmerman. As the new rooms were more casual, their detailing was simplified from elements found in the formal areas. The silhouetted wood columns that separate the family room from the dining area are based on millwork elsewhere in the house; they allow the rooms to feel open and connected, yet match the scale and aesthetic of the original architecture. Steel casement windows match existing windows and echo their delicate proportions. A limestone fireplace was also designed and fabricated with appropriate traditional details.

The expansion included a new family room, family dining room, kitchen, mudroom and garages on the lower level, along with three bedrooms and baths upstairs. The front entry



PREVIOUS PAGE AND
ABOVE: PETER
ZIMMERMAN ARCHITECTS
CREATED A SEAMLESS
ADDITION TO A BRYN
MAWR TUDOR HOME

courtyard and approach were redesigned as well. “We used the addition to enhance the original architecture and the approach to the front of the house,” notes Zimmerman.

Authenticity of materials ensured a seamless integration. Zimmerman’s team researched the English terra cotta roof tiles to ensure a perfect match, examining the archives of the Ludowici Company to find and reproduce samples of the obsolete tile. The brick and Wissahickon schist patterns were matched on the new exterior, and the PZA team and stonemasons coordinated accurate pointing, mortar and color. Even the slight swayback appearance of the roof ridges was reproduced in the addition to imply roof settlement over time.

“The real success of this project is a caring client who understands and appreciates architecture,” Zimmerman says.

Like Zimmerman, architect Stephen Varenhorst also understands the critical importance of “retaining harmony of form” in architectural additions. His firm, Stephen Varenhorst Architects, is known for sensitive addition and renovation work. “It is important to incorporate similar proportions, from roof pitches to room sizes, to ensure the new appears consistent and balanced with the old,” he explains.

For an addition to a Haverford residence, Varenhorst and SVA Project Architect Cathie Dopkin designed two stories of family living spaces to complement a traditional



1920s-era home. The addition includes a basement-level playroom and main-level family and breakfast rooms. The family room shares nearly identical dimensions with the home's formal living room. Ceiling heights, room proportions and continuity of millwork extend from the original architecture. Custom, built-in cabinetry recalls similar casework in the living and dining rooms, while ceiling coffers continue the traditional detailing. And special elements, like a circular skylight above the breakfast table, show the architect's creativity within aesthetic parameters.

The new spaces feel comfortable and connected to the rest of the interiors. They also relate to, and enhance, the outdoor

environment. Varenhorst re-envisioned the home's relationship to its property through his design for a two-tiered brick terrace. The terrace acts as an outdoor "room" that unifies the new and existing spaces around a pool; its center stair is on axis with the home's entry hall, creating implied symmetry and balance. An exterior stair to the basement lets children in wet swimsuits access a playroom bathroom; French doors on three sides of the family room let in light and wraparound views of the yard.

The clients say the addition feels like it has always been part of the house: "It is a logical extension of space; the new rooms don't feel distinctly different." In fact, the new structure replaced an older, smaller

**STEPHEN VARENHORST
ARCHITECTS CREATED A
TWO-STORY SENSITIVE
ADDITION FOR A
HAVERFORD HOME**



**ABOVE: A SKYLIGHT SEEMS AS IF IT COULD BE AN ORIGINAL ELEMENT OF THE HOUSE
OPPOSITE: ENTRANCES ON THE ADDITION OFFER EASIER ACCESS TO THE OUTDOOR POOL**



addition that the clients say always felt like an add-on. "SVA did a very good job; they took a classic Main Line house and adapted it to our current lifestyle," the clients say.

"It should be more than just adding a room," Varenhorst believes. "We try to make more of every project." By encouraging connectivity between rooms and to the outdoors, improving circulation and including modern-day amenities, sensitive additions such as the Haverford project offer more than square footage. They offer the impression that the house, just as graceful as before, had never been altered.

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