

LOOKING UP Architect Bill Boehm cut away a large part of the second floor to create a vaulted ceiling in the living room. Interior designer Jon Andersen-Miller emphasized the Craftsman-style details by painting the moldings white and the walls in lighter and darker sand tones. Facing page: Boehm added an oversized window to the living room, a gabled portico at the front entry, and a shed dormer in the master bedroom.





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DESIGNING

A Fresh Start

A RENOVATION OPENS A LITTLE CAPE TO LIGHT, SPACE, AND ACCESSIBILITY. BY RACHEL LEVITT

Jane Bowers had lived in her five-story South End brown for decades, all the time yearning for a garden to work in and enjoy. She stayed even when the house seemed too big for one, because she loved her vibrant neighborhood and artistic friends. One day in the summer of 2003, her vertical house became an enormous obstacle. A close family member was in a motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed at the age of 33. Strong and resolved, Bowers decided to find a new home that could offer accessible living while balancing city life with suburban green.

In Jamaica Plain, she found a property with stately pines, plenty of gardening potential, and a charming squirrel house in the backyard. It was also close to public transportation and Jamaica Pond, satisfying her craving for urban conveniences. But the house, a sad 1950s Cape, needed help. With low ceilings on the first floor, two bedrooms squeezed under the gabled roof on the second, and just a handful of modest windows, the interior felt dark and cramped and anything but accessible.

To master a transformation, Bowers turned to Boehm Architecture principal Bill Boehm, who had helped with the renovation of her South End home along with his former partner Matt Andersen-Miller (now practicing in Los Angeles). "They knew the city and were energy-conscious," says Bowers. "Plus, I liked their design - not over the top. They had a contemporary, modern sensibility and made houses that were open and livable."

Boehm's first challenge was the entry. With the front door three steps up from the driveway, a conventional wheelchair ramp would have taken up most of the front lawn. Instead, Boehm ran a ramp from the driveway along the side of the house, to an open deck with access to both the garden and the back of what had been the attached garage. Boehm converted that space to a bedroom and study, raising the floor so it was level with the first floor of the main house - a critical change for someone in a wheelchair. He also added a bathroom with a curbless shower and a sink with space for a wheelchair to slide underneath.

BRIGHT ENTRY Glass in the new gable above the front door brings plenty of light into the hall, where Boehm has continued the Craftsman theme with architectural details such as beams, a built-in bench, and transom moldings.



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Boehm and Bowers also wanted to open up the house without destroying its simple aesthetic. "The Cape," says the architect, "is a venerable New England icon that has been spread across America's suburbs like peanut butter. It has not evolved much, so we enjoyed the challenge of transforming this one." To bring in sunlight and natural breezes while maintaining the house's character, Boehm cut out a large section of the second floor to create a vaulted ceiling in the living room, bumping up the roof for even more interior height and inserting an oversize window. He then cut away the walls separating the central staircase from the living and dining rooms and designed a Craftsman-inspired screen to divide the space without blocking the view or the light. The Craftsman theme was carried over into the transom moldings, which interior designer Jon Andersen-Miller painted a slightly lighter hue than the main walls. The designer, formerly of Boston, is now married to and partners with Matt Andersen-Miller at Andersen-Miller Design in California.

On the second floor, a modified shed dormer brings additional light and head space into the master bedroom. Another puncture in the wall,



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what Bowers calls her Juliet window, allows her to gaze out over her living room.

Boehm's selective subtractions were designed to tell the story of the original Cape. He consistently boxed in the house's frame rather than making all of the surfaces flush. In the living room, the original roofline came deep into the space, and ledges mark where the floors had been. Boehm exploited his idiosyncratic spaces by tucking concealed lighting into corners for dramatic effect, a theatrical trick that shows off Bowers's art collection.

Most materials and mechanical systems were selected for environmental sustainability. The back entry, office, and kitchen feature a linoleum floor that not only feels softer than wood under bare feet but is made of nontoxic resins and wood byproducts; it's also recyclable and low-maintenance. A large fan installed at the highest point of the living room draws warm air up and out, so Bowers almost never uses air conditioning. Outside, Boehm used composite decking, which Bowers suggested flipping to hide the faux wood grain. "I don't like to use things made to look like [something] they're not," she says.



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The Cape also has a new gabled portico over the front door, making it stand out on a street of traditional homes. Instead of having the door face the street, Boehm turned it 90 degrees to face the driveway. Bowers's friend Phuong Luu says that's good feng shui. When she saw the door, she said, "Oh. So much better!" According to folk wisdom, she says, a straight line to the door from the street means the money flows right out.

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PART OF THE PLAN Jane Bowers stands on her back deck, where a wheelchair ramp blends seamlessly into the design scheme. Below, from top: in the master bathroom, 3-by-16-inch chartreuse tiles were laid in a stacked-bond pattern; in the master bedroom, Boehm created a cathedral ceiling beneath the new shed dormer.

