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A welcome change

With French and Eastern inspiration, a renovation is realized

IF IT'S TRUE that in creating our grown-up homes we strive to improve upon our childhood dreams, then Maria Bransier's inspiration for her recent Wallingford remodel could be traced to the construction of an ill-fated doll house she created as a child.

"When I was younger I was not very good at building," she confesses. "My sisters and I made this doll house, and I was in charge of one room. My room was a total disaster, and all the furniture was crooked. So I never envisioned that I would ever do anything with design."

But when Maria and her husband, Nicolas, went in search of a house they could make a home, they had one very specific requirement in mind from the beginning.



Inspired by designer Jacqueline Morabito, Maria wanted to infuse the space with natural objects and simple lines. The couple settled on the light wood, with radiant in-floor heating, to reflect the sunlight and warm the space. The hearth is a Rumford fireplace, which is designed tall and shallow to reflect more heat.



Nicolas Bransier got his wish for a big bathtub with this unique model, called Kyoto and manufactured by Americh Corp. An expansive 68-square-inch, 22 inches deep, the tub has a surround of veined marble.

"We were looking for something we could renovate," says Maria, who, aside from her early childhood missteps, has been drawn to the world of architecture and interiors for many years. "I always wanted to be in design and do architecture. I was thinking I would go back and study it, so it was kind of like a dream to renovate a house."

Nicolas acknowledges that Maria needed to prove to herself she could do it. The result is a 2,000-square-foot renovation that is a creative

expression far from the lopsided room of her childhood inventions. The

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gauzy white drapes throughout the house frame warm, comfortable rooms touched with Maria's international style and accented with modern sensibilities. The extensive remodel, which included adding a second floor to capture the views of downtown Seattle, has been transformed into a welcoming home for the couple and their newest addition, son Julian.

To add shape and substance to the dream, Maria worked with architectural designer Frank Dill, whom she had met several years ago while exploring another project. "She was much more involved than most clients tend to be," says Dill, who recently relocated to Boston. "She demonstrated an unusual level of interest in the whole process, and it worked out very well."

"When I met with him, I had all of these pictures, and I definitely had something in mind," says Maria, who had done extensive research and knew the look and feel she wanted to achieve. "I really became obsessed with it. I studied magazines and searched the Internet."



"It was a real multimedia effort," Dill notes. "She shot some videos of houses and projects she liked, she took tons of digital photos, and she had a portfolio of clippings from magazines. She had a huge scrapbook of ideas."

The hub of activity during the day, the open and airy kitchen has a series of Lindel custom French doors that open to a large backyard deck. The kitchen and seating area (which has a fireplace that isn't shown) was once a small kitchen and bedroom. Maria and architectural designer Frank Dill decided to open up the space and tear out every wall.

To solidify the approach, Maria and Dill went around to retail stores and took a few more photographs. They also asked architect Henry Lo, of HhLodesign, during the initial design phase to create three-dimensional renderings of the proposed structure. Dovetail Inc. acted as general contractor for the project and was responsible for creating the unique detailed woodworking that Dill had envisioned for the house.



Adding a second floor allowed views of downtown Seattle from the upstairs office and guest room. The custom Lindel French doors bring in more light and open to a small deck.

Maria and Dill had a pretty good relationship, Nicolas says. "I tried to get involved, but they were talking in code. It was hard for me to step up. I was very quickly lost because I didn't have the vocabulary." But, he proudly concedes that Maria "has great taste, and my taste is not so good. So, I trusted her. We agreed on the open space in the first floor, and we agreed on the basics of the house."

But Nicolas did weigh in on

one feature that was very important to him: the bath in the upstairs master suite. "I love taking baths, and I wanted a *big* bathtub. And that was the starting point for the bathroom." It has since become one of his favorite rooms, along with his study upstairs.

Maria's favorite spaces are the rooms that include a hearth — the living room and kitchen. "During the day, I'm in the kitchen space, and in the evening I'm in the living room. When the sun sets, the color of the light can change, and it comes through the back room, and then I love the way it moves around the house."

The style of the interiors is a multicultural mix of international influences — no surprise since it is part of their personal histories as well as their work lives. Nicolas is from France, Maria moved to the Seattle area from the Philippines when she was 2. They met five years ago while working for Bowne Global Solutions, a company that provides translation, localization, technical writing and interpretation services worldwide.



The original structure was one story with a basement. The Bransiers used the lower level to add off-street parking. Frank Dill designed a more traditional exterior, mixing stucco with wood windows, to capture more of the spirit of the existing neighborhood. A friend of Maria's, Joy Del Calzo, designed the landscaping.

Their nature-inspired rooms are accented with furniture pieces that have a Zen-like quality. One designer who influenced Maria's "eye" is Jacqueline Morabito, from the south of France. "I love the simplicity of her furniture line, and she tends to use natural objects in her decor to add texture and form to soften the simple lines of her furnishings." The side tables in the living room are from Africa, and the lamps scattered throughout the house are from French designer Christian Liaigre, who combines French tradition with an Eastern inspiration.

"Sitting here, I don't think any of the furniture came from me," Nicolas observes as he scans the living room. "She got rid of all my furniture. I had to capitulate. There was no way I was going to keep my old couch."

"But," he adds with a smile, "I guess I do have good taste. I chose *her*."

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