



## PHOENIX RISES

AFTER A DEVASTATING FIRE, PETER SACHS ARCHITECTS AND S + H CONSTRUCTION RESURRECT AN OLD COLONIAL.

BY MARY GRAUERHOLZ  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL J. LEE



A fire started in the basement during renovations and took this project in another direction. S + H Construction turned a devastating event into a success story.

## THE YOUNG COUPLE FOUND A HOME TO MAKE THEIR OWN IN

a community they both loved. The 1925 colonial, in a neighborhood marked by picturesque homes and rolling land that reflects its early farming days, was an old beauty that required only minor updating. Six months later, the renovation was in progress when the family experienced a devastating blow: A fire had started in the basement and quickly spread, turning the house and its contents—even the building permit—to ashes.

"It was very traumatic and surreal, to have nothing but the clothes on your back," the homeowner says. But that was several years ago. In the meantime, he and his family, working with S+H Construction in Cambridge, have their beloved new home, a shining emblem of success over hardship, with exquisite details, airy interiors, and an exterior with the same sweet charm as the original.

Starting from scratch allowed the family to fine-tune their dream home. An addition provides a large, open kitchen and living room, perfect for gathering friends and family. Over the addition are a new master bedroom and bath outfitted with luxe fixtures. The kitchen's recessed lighting, custom cabinetry, and floor of reclaimed wood from the Suwannee River create a warm, inviting mood.

The construction work involved a full range of tasks, from fine points to ultra-heavy duty. Sarah Lawson, the owner of S+H Construction, recalls her staff excavating two feet of sand in the basement to give the home's ceiling more height. "Foundation walls are embedded in a certain amount of dirt," Lawson says. "Literally, you can expose the bottom of a wall, depending on the underpinning. It's not for the faint of heart." The digging-out made way for a new game room and family space.

As a full-service, high-end contractor, S+H was able to move seamlessly through the project, despite its enormity. "When you have a fire, there are a lot of technical challenges," Lawson says. "We rebuilt substantially, among other things, the house height changed."

S+H has history behind it, operating in Cambridge for 40 years. The company's 50 employees undertake new renovations and construction in the Greater Boston area. Lawson loves houses and appreciates the coordination and care a major renovation requires. As in many of the company's projects, the build meant that Lawson called on staff from almost every corner, from heavy-equipment operators to carpenters and stone masons who work more like artisans.

Clean-lined details shine throughout the three-story 3,450-square-foot home, distinguished by a blue clapboard exterior studded with 50 traditional windows.

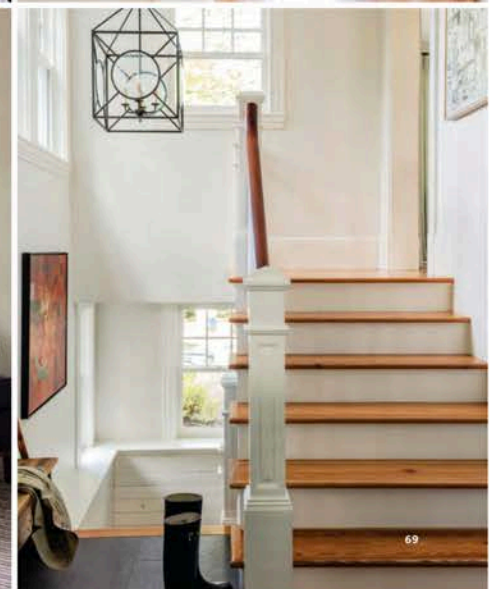
"The design concept was to create a slightly contemporary center-entrance colonial," says Peter Sachs, principal of Peter Sachs Architects in Newton, who collaborated with

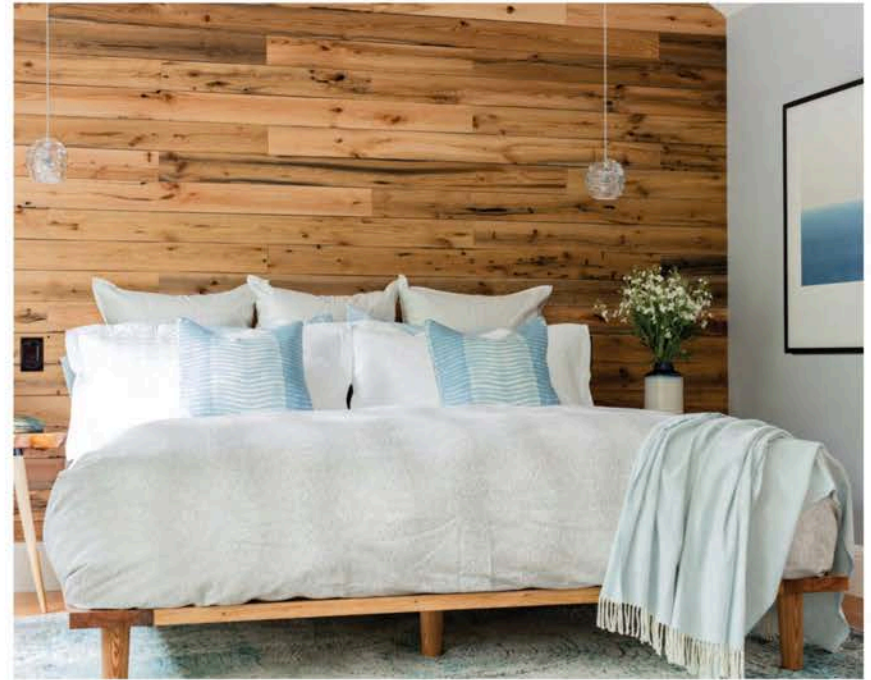


The family worked with Peter Sachs Architects and S+H Construction to create their dream home, while keeping the charm of the original structure. Interior designer Kristyn Meech Brenner created a traditional color palette for the interiors.

his project architect, Fede Arellano, on the design. The front entrance is a fine symbol of the architectural spirit that went into the project: a small steep-pitched portico, with wide steps and a granite and bluestone walkway, looks perfectly at home.

While the exterior presents as somewhat large, the interior is intimate and cozy. A warm, traditional color palette, against the white millwork, presents a cohesive look. Interior designer Kristyn Meech Brenner, owner of Bells





Furnishings are kept simple and relaxed. Horizontal board walls add a rustic touch to the bedrooms. S + H Construction dug below the house to add a billiard room to the space.

and Whistles in Belmont, was a great help, the homeowner says: "We took inspiration from Kristyn's color palette."

"We maximized every bit of space," he adds. Natural light floods through the many windows, even in the lower level. The open plan of the living room, dining room, and kitchen form an ideal gathering spot. In warm weather, guests mingle on the adjoining patio, crafted of bluestone and granite and connected to the side entrance of the mudroom.

The mudroom is an unexpected knockout. Large, grand, and high-ceilinged, it is positioned between the two lower levels, offering pleasing views and an easy flow between the two floors. A large, open staircase simplifies socializing.

The game room, in the former basement, had been planned from the get-go. "We wanted a magnet for kids,"

the homeowner says. That has been a big success, with neighboring children frequently dropping in.

Today the neighborhood means even more to the couple and their son. "After the fire, we were reminded of the reasons why we settled here in Belmont," the homeowner says. "Our entire neighborhood came in around us. We were surrounded by so much love."

Community works both ways, and Lawson says the homeowners were ideal clients. "They were really involved in the details of design and every finish. They love their house. With the history of the house, the homeowners and the contractor have to have a good relationship. This was a real partnership." ■

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