

ALASKA HOME

SUMMER 2010

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SUMMER
Entertaining

Home facelifts

A restoration architect shares advice for planning the exterior home remodel

Sam Combs has been a restoration architect for more than 20 years, specializing in updating homes as historic as the 1915 Oscar Anderson

House in downtown Anchorage, while keeping the integrity of the original architecture. He also helps Alaskan homeowners update their houses, more often of the 1970s vintage. Combs has attracted national attention for some of these projects – his work was featured on HGTV’s “Curb Appeal” show. In this interview, he tells ALASKA HOME about two of his favorite restorations, and why working with what you’ve got rather than starting from scratch can be a good choice – for finances and design.

ALASKA HOME: *What should homeowners know before jumping into a restoration/remodel?*

Sam Combs: Clients first need to determine what spaces they need and how they will use the additional space. That dictates how the outside will look. Clients should know that when jumping into a restoration/renovation/remodel or addition project that they probably would be more comfortable living elsewhere while construction is going on. In the Brys Home project (see sidebar on next page), the family stayed in their home because we broke the project up into phases that allowed them to stay downstairs while the upstairs was being worked on.

They still had to take breaks from the house and there was a lot of eating out when the kitchen was being redone.

As a restoration architect, how do you incorporate new design into old design seamlessly?

With historical restoration I always stress honesty in the differentiation from old to new materials. In projects that are not historical, I work to meld the designs from the old to new materials. In many cases, the matching of the old to new siding or visa versa helps in the melding of styles. Additionally, the proportions have to be kept in mind to differen-

ALASKA HOME:
TELL US ABOUT
TWO OF YOUR
FAVORITE ANCHORAGE
RESTORATION PROJECTS,
THE BRY'S HOME
(SHOWN ON THIS PAGE)
AND THE DODD HOME
(SHOWN ON NEXT PAGE).



Before



THE BRY'S HOME

Sam Combs: The clients contacted me to add curb appeal to their 1974 home. Growing up, I lived in Italy and was inspired by hill towns such as San Gimignano, where families tried to build the tallest tower into their homes. I frequently incorporate towers into my projects, including this one. The existing house had a nondescript entry that broke up the main living area by taking up a large amount of floor space so we removed the stairs and the floor was filled in to provide continuous living area. The entry and stairs were located in a new tower that allows light into the living room and provides a wonderful entry. The kitchen was dated and needed to be opened up to the living and dining areas. The garage was too small so it was expanded and a room was placed above to provide a crafts area and a balcony for outdoor dining and neighborhood interaction in the summer. A solarium was added between the garage and tower to allow a secondary access and a feel of outdoor/indoor living space in the winter. The homeowner later told me he didn't see the point of the solarium at first, but now they use it all the time and it has become of their favorite rooms.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

tiate the old from the new, such as a tower or change in window sizing and patterns.

What's the permitting process like for these types of renovations? How long does it take?

The permitting process for an existing building is much more time consuming than for a totally new structure. Plan reviewers tend to look at existing structures much more thoroughly than at new buildings. This is because the building codes change every three years and structural requirements have changed over the years. My structural engineer's philosophy is to create a

new self supporting structure for an addition that doesn't rely on the existing structure and this seems to make the plan reviewers more at ease with approving our projects in a more timely manner.

Obviously costs differ for every project. But what would a project like the Dodd Home (shown on next page) or the Bry's Home (shown on this page) cost?

The Dodd home renovation and addition was approximately \$213 per square foot. It added a total of 658 new square feet. The final cost was \$140,154, not too much considering how the

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THE DODD HOME

Sam Combs: The Dodd family's Inlet View-area home was one of the last projects I drew by hand. I had previously designed an addition on the north side of the home about 20 years before that included expanding the kitchen, creating a new family room and new deck.

The Dodds wanted to update after raising four children in the home. One priority was that each would get their own bathroom off the master bedroom. The only place to build was over the existing garage. This presented a challenge because the garage did not meet the current code and was not sufficient to support a second floor. There was also the question of how to access the new space from the existing house. The solution to the garage support issue was to basically build a new structure that would support the addition. An outdoor balcony presents a friendly, welcoming face to the home. It is completely covered by the overhanging steep gable end roof that shelters and protects it while allowing privacy for the master bedroom. The existing covered walkway to the main entry was a feature that the Dodds wished to remain in place so it was incorporated into the design. When the owners are outside working in the garden they get people stopping by to say how much they like the home, even years after completion.



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home was transformed. For the Brys home, total construction cost was about \$190,000. The existing square footage of the house was 3,231 including the garage. We added approximately 1,376 square feet and the amount of floor space that was renovated was nearly the entire home except for the existing three downstairs bedrooms, utility room and bathroom. The cost was about \$41.24 per square foot for addition and renovation which is a very reasonable investment to make into your home.

How does updating a home's exterior impact market value?

If you look at these two projects and compare them to their original lack of curb appeal, drab appearance and drab colors, the increase in market value is immense and owners should reap the rewards if they choose to sell their home. I've found that the majority of clients I work with tend to stay in the homes indefinitely because they have designed it to their wants and needs. I like to tell clients that I am designing with them and not for them. After all, the result will be a home that they live with day in and day out. ❁

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