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Southern  
**HOME+GARDEN**

EXPERT TIPS FOR A BEAUTIFUL HOME—INSIDE AND OUT

## Modern Compromise

*Charleston architect Mary Mac Wilson transforms her circa-1890 Victorian into a home that flatters both its history and her love of contemporary design.*



### The Living Room

This Victorian sofa belonged to Wilson's great-grandmother. She gave it new life with simple gray linen upholstery instead of its previous brocade.

STYLING: ELLY POSTON





### The Exterior

Victorian houses are traditionally painted in bright, contrasting hues. Mary Mac Wilson chose a neutral exterior palette to bring her circa-1890 Charleston home into the 21st century.

### BEFORE



**“THIS WAS EXACTLY** NOT the type of house I was looking for,” Mary Mac Wilson says with a laugh. And so her unexpected and exhilarating dream home reno began. Though Auburn University- and Parsons School of Design-trained architect Wilson admits that Charleston, South Carolina’s historic architecture is well worth the fanfare it receives, she considers herself a modernist

at heart and wasn’t sure how she would reconcile her love of clean lines with her equal affection for downtown Charleston. “I love that contemporary architecture responds to the way we live now with technology and a more casual approach to living,” she says. “But we knew we wanted to be a part of the liveliness of the city’s historic neighborhoods.”

One afternoon—after a Sunday

brunch at The Macintosh—she and her husband, Cooper (an attorney), stumbled upon a circa-1890 Eastlake Victorian home for sale on Spring Street in the up-and-coming Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood. A beaten-down rental with chain-link fences, the home had a brightly colored pink-and-green exterior with decorative—and dilapidated—gingerbread detailing all

over it. But after touring the place, she saw its potential to showcase the best of the old alongside modern additions.

She approached the renovation carefully, restoring original architectural details such as the decorative exterior balusters, the mantels, the kitchen’s small brick fireplace, and the stunning archway between the living room and dining room while also incorporating





### The Foyer

Wilson (pictured above with her husband, Cooper) meticulously restored the front door, its hardware, and the home's millwork so it can last another 120 years.



contemporary elements that make no apologies for being new. "I feel like being clear about what is old and what is new is a much more sensitive and respectful approach," she says. "Any new floors we installed are painted white, and the new cabinetry is clean and streamlined. They reflect the here and now, which to me is just as valid a time in the life of this house." See Wilson's magic touch for mixing modern with historic.



**BEFORE**

**CHALLENGE:**  
*No formal living or dining room*  
**SOLUTION:**  
***Ditch the makeshift bedrooms.***

What was once the home's formal living room and

dining room had been walled off and turned into bedrooms to accommodate renters. This cut into much-needed first-floor living space and brought the 2,700-square-foot

home's bedroom count to a whopping (and unnecessary) five. Wilson's first order of business was to reopen both rooms to the center hallway and reconnect them by uncovering a stunning original archway between the two that a previous owner had enclosed with drywall.

**CHALLENGE:**  
*Super-traditional interior architecture*  
**SOLUTION:**  
***Add edge with modern lighting.***

Contemporary chandeliers counterbalance the home's classic trims and moldings. "They are a fun, easy way to create contrast in this house," says Wilson, though she rarely turns them on. "I don't actually like overhead light," she says, "but I love light fixtures!"



**CHALLENGE:**  
A dark interior kitchen

**SOLUTION:**  
**Steal light from peripheral rooms.**

Wilson moved the kitchen from the back of the house to an interior room with better access to the dining room (at right). The trouble? The room had only one window. She removed the wall between the kitchen and the new



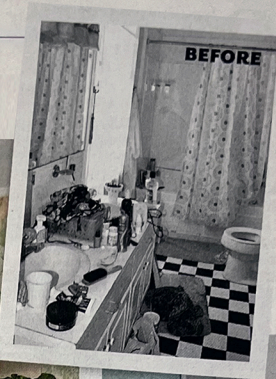
eat-in den (shown below) at the back of the house, flooding the space with light from French doors and windows. This also had the added benefit of creating a casual, open floor plan that better suited the couple's day-to-day living and entertaining needs. The space is now her favorite room, in large part because of the utilitarian finishes she used, such as cedar shelving, stainless steel, and marble.

**The Kitchen**

CB2's cord pendant hangs from the second story's floor joists, which were exposed during the renovation. The countertops sport a modern waterfall edge.







### The Master Bedroom

Years of paint and wallpaper residue covered these walls. Wilson loved the unique texture and story that they told about the past. "This was one of the things that got me really excited about this house," she says.



#### CHALLENGE:

*Loud color palette*

#### SOLUTION:

**Go neutral to lighten things up.**

When the couple purchased the home, the paint colors—on the interior and exterior—were bold and all over the map. To make the home feel more open and modern, they stuck with a minimal paint palette that included Valspar's Notre Dame and Comet Dust throughout. Wilson says, "The colors we selected

brighten things and are a clean backdrop for our eclectic art and furniture."

#### CHALLENGE:

*A small furniture budget*

#### SOLUTION:

**Hunt for affordable secondhand gems.**

Wilson's decorating strategy was to mix contemporary furniture with antiques and not spend a fortune doing it. The chairs in her master bedroom were a side-of-the-road discovery that she had

reupholstered and refinished. The living room's cane-back chairs are from a Habitat for Humanity ReStore, the farm table in the eat-in den was a Craigslist purchase, and the Sputnik-style chandelier in the dining room was on eBay.

#### CHALLENGE:

*Boring bath*

**SOLUTION:**  
**Bring back the claw-foot tub.**

An existing claw-foot tub from the guest bath—which

wasn't practical by itself for her and her husband's purposes—was re-enameled and placed inside the footprint of a new shower they installed in their master bath. The drain can be plugged as usual for when they want a deep soak. To shower, they simply stand in the tub and leave the drain uncorked. "I'm sentimental about these old things," she says. "I felt like I needed to use it. Putting it in the shower felt like a fun way to make it mine." ●