

## rambler redux

**Opening up the floor plan transforms a humble ranch into a princely home.**

By John Riha. Photography by Jenifer Jordan



**T**he owners of this 1970s rambler loved everything about their home—the wonderful lakeside lot and a western Minneapolis neighborhood featuring rolling hills and tree-lined streets. Everything, that is, except the structure itself. “The lot is so fabulous,” they say, “but the house was mediocre. It didn’t have great views of the lake and it needed to be opened up. We debated for a long time whether to just tear it down and start over.”

Bulldozers, however, were never summoned. Instead, the couple lived in the house for three years, all the while developing clear ideas of how it might be changed for the better. They came to realize that houses of the era, while short on character, were stocked with potential.

“It was a good-sized house for our family,” they say, “and we didn’t really want to add space. But we wanted to create something that was more sophisticated, yet comfortable and welcoming. We entertain a lot, and that was important to us.”

Slowly, they began to hone their dreams into specifics—install larger windows facing the lake; establish a visual corridor through the center of the house that would connect the entry to the lake view; raise the 8-foot ceilings in the living and dining areas; enlarge the master suite; and add a screened-in porch.

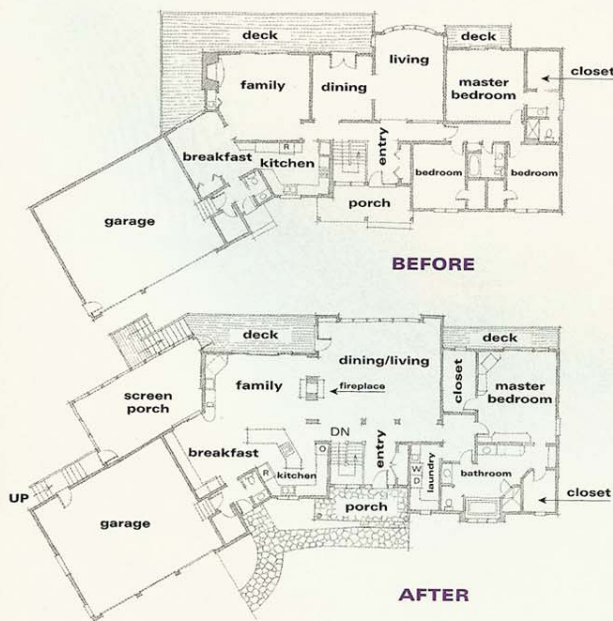
To help accomplish their goals, they hired Terence and Camilla Hughes of The Housedressing Company in Minneapolis. Recommended by a friend, the Hugheses brought their experience as designers and

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**Top:** Before the renovation, the best feature of this conventional 1970s ranch was its beautiful lakeside lot. **Middle:** Restructuring the central gable was the key to the project. A small bump-out bay with its own gable allowed a whirlpool bath in the reconfigured master suite and added architectural interest to the exterior. **Bottom:** A curved ceiling and new columns turned the gable-end portico into a welcoming entry.



A stylish sanctuary in the form of a bug-beating, screened-in porch allows comfortable outdoor entertaining and views of the lake. There’s space enough for three round tables.



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builders, as well as the attention to detail that often comes from a small company.

“Terry and Camilla were easy to work with,” say the owners. “They listened to us, our personalities meshed well, and they were very responsive to our needs.”

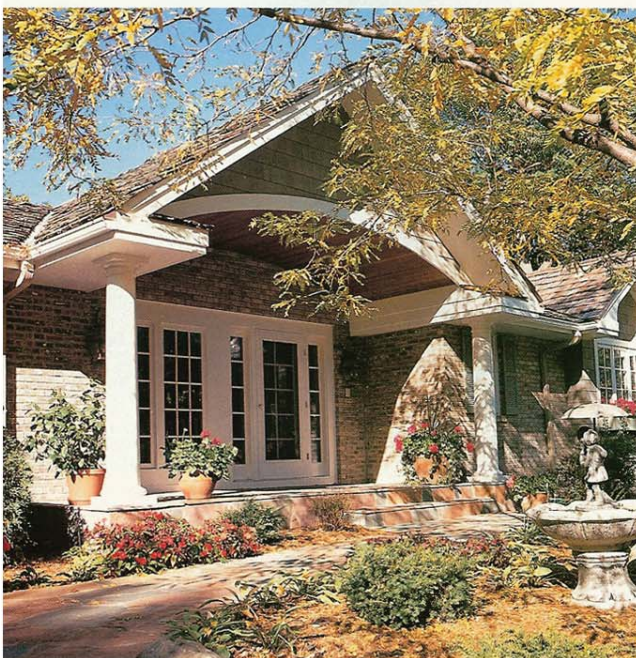
The Hugheses’ first objective was to design interior spaces that would flow readily from one to the other. The solution was both simple and complex. Removing walls between the living, dining, kitchen, and family areas would create a large great-room unencumbered by partitions. The homeowners could be preparing food in the kitchen and still have contact with guests, and the living, dining, and family areas would flow seamlessly into one another. That was the easy part. The challenges came from the fact that the existing living room floor was sunken and would need to be reframed to bring it in alignment with the rest of the house. At the same time, the homeowners wanted more headroom, so all the ceiling heights would somehow have to be altered.

To literally gather all the changes under one roof, the Hugheses hit upon the idea of restructuring a large gable that ran the width of the house from front to back and intersected the main roof at right angles. The new roof would allow them to elevate ceiling heights, add taller windows facing the lake, and provide a visual link from the entry to the back of the house. The re-engineered gable could also provide a much-needed face-lift for the exterior, ridding the house of what Terence calls “that quintessential ranch style.”

With a main plan established, the Hugheses and their clients began to plot the many refinements that would transform the house from mundane to marvelous. At the street-side entry, the gable was redesigned into a stylish portico with a curved ceiling that would be supported by a broad entablature and classical columns. On the lake side the living room and dining room were bumped out only six feet, but the modest gain translated into an enormous perceptual addition—a 16-foot-wide bank of divided-light windows topped by curved transoms that echo the curved ceiling of the portico. Part of the

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ILLUSTRATIONS: CARSON COE





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existing deck was then removed and a new screen porch was grafted onto the side of the house and garage.

Inside, the renovation plan called for selective reinvention rather than all-out change. The layout of the kitchen, for example, was considered basically sound, although a new island reclaimed cabinet space lost by the removal of a partition wall. The oak cabinets would remain, but get a much-needed face-lift.

"They were this yellowy, '70-ish color," says Terence. "We suggested stripping them and giving them a darker, less-dated stain color."

The idea extended to the new vaulted ceiling, where the tongue-and-groove paneling was stained to provide comforting warmth, while the rafter and ridge beams were painted as accents. A new double-sided fireplace was added between the family and dining areas to help establish a sense of boundary for the two spaces yet permit traffic flow and an

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**Top:** Raising the ceiling heights under a front-to-back gable roof added volume to the new great-room without altering the basic footprint of the house. An expansive bank of windows provide excellent views of the lake—a feature that had previously been missing. **Above:** The renovation fulfilled one of the homeowners' basic criteria: to be able to see all the way from the entry to the lake-facing windows.



The kitchen was given a much-needed face-lift with refinished cabinets and new appliances and fixtures. The granite-top island takes the place of a partition wall that was removed, and provides plenty of space for the homeowners' extensive collection of cookbooks. "We both love to cook," they note.

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unimpeded visual connection. To unify the entire house, all the 3-inch ranch-style casings and trim were replaced by 6-inch moldings with more interesting and sophisticated profiles. "The new trim really helped," say the owners. "It gave a whole new feel to the inside of the house."

To complete the renovation, three small bedrooms and two tiny baths on the main level were essentially gutted and reconfigured into a gracious master suite with a fireplace, a walk-out balcony, and a walk-in closet. Generous new windows for the suite gather an impressive view of the lake, and last, but by no means least, is a new laundry room, strategically positioned near the master suite.

Despite having heard remodeling horror stories passed on by family and friends, these homeowners added their own twist to the ending of their renovation tale. "We had fun," they say. "This whole process went smoothly." □



**Renovation Designers:** Terence and Camilla Hughes  
**Interior Designer:** Marie Meko  
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**For more information, see the Buying Guide on page 114.**