



Northbrook Star Features Design Construction Concepts, Inc.

Solid old house gets smart new makeover

Not unlike medicine and law, construction is also best left to specialists, rather than generalists, on occasion. Consider the “case” of the Mages residence, for example.

An approximate 2,600-square-foot, Tudor-style two-story near the Bahai Temple in Wilmette, the Mages’ residence, was built in the 1920s by a road contractor.

A devotee of brick and concrete for obvious reasons, he built his home much the same way he built his roads—with thick concrete floors, unusually thick foundation walls, road mesh, re-bar and so on.

When the current owners decided about a year-and-a-half ago to change the entry way, move the powder room and double the size of the kitchen, they first turned to a “generalist”—a friend who happens to be a builder/developer, who builds new construction row houses in the city.

“He told us, ‘My guys can do this for you, no problem.’ But it became obvious early on, it just wasn’t going to happen. The job was going to take someone more experienced in remodeling and renovation, not just new constructions,” said Mary Mages.

Enter Design Construction Concepts, Ltd., Northbrook, a full-service design/build firm, that specializes in high-end remodeling and renovation projects.

“Our architect recommended them. We met them, liked what they had to say and lucked out in terms of scheduling,” Mages said.

Though Mages describes the balance of the project as “heaven,” that doesn’t mean there wasn’t a little bit of hell to pay along the way.

“With old houses, you find things you don’t always expect,” she pointed out in understatement.

In this case, even though the site had been marked by utility companies, as well as the municipality, the sewer had been inadvertently mismarked.

“When we dug, we hit the clay sewer line, and cut right through it. On day one. And that was before we discovered there was a whole separate sewer line, that no one knew anything about before now,” said Andrew Poticha, Design Construction Concepts’ partner, along with Michael Menn, AIA.



Above: Kitchen After



Left: Kitchen Before

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On the second day of work, Design Construction Concepts' workers discovered the home had a lead water service, another unanticipated problem that had to be remedied before the "real" work could begin.

"Everything was up hill from there, though," Menn said.

That's not to say there weren't a few subsequent challenges.

"For example, they didn't make the exterior bricks anymore. Compared to current styles, these were both odd in terms of size and color. We either had to find something similar or complementary. In the end, we decided on something complementary that looks fabulous," said Menn.

Likewise, in order to get the front pillars "just so," Design Construction Concepts had to have them hand-milled locally by a master craftsman.

"In short, there were precious few retail solutions available to us. Depending on the challenge at-hand, we had to come up with custom answers, which actually isn't all that unusual in these types of remodeling and renovation projects. That's precisely why you need an experienced contractor," Poticha said.

The year-long project ended this past fall. False starts and a few wasted months aside, the Mages couldn't be happier with the finished project.

"We're still doing a few last minute things, but that's mostly limited to decorations. Everything else is done," Mages said.

According to Mages, Design Construction Concepts did an excellent job all the way around.

"The not only did beautiful work, they were very responsive to us. Even their subs were wonderful. I actually enjoyed having them around," noted Mages.

Mages says the end result is everything she had hope for—and more.

"I come downstairs every morning and I love everything about it—inside and out. It just looks great."