

New Beginnings

Oregon designers reinvent classic buildings

written by Melissa Dalton

BELOW After a fire, Office 52 Architecture redesigned and rebuilt a friend's Foursquare with modern touches.

A Modern Foursquare in Southeast Portland

WALK DOWN ANY street in inner Southeast Portland and you'll see the Foursquare. As a popular build after the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition of 1905, Foursquares stand two-and-a-half stories high, usually have a wide front porch, and eschew the ornate flourish common to their Victorian predecessors. Even the name is straightforward, referring to the four boxy rooms on the main level. "The Foursquare is a classic Portland typology," said architect Isaac Campbell, who runs Office 52 Architecture with partner, architect Michelle LaFoe. "The only house we have more of are bungalows."

In 2013, close friends of the pair lost their 1906 Foursquare in a devastating fire that occurred when the family was out. "The family got back from dinner and the house was engulfed," Campbell said. Afterward, friends and neighbors immediately pitched in to help rebuild, including Campbell and LaFoe. "The house was still standing but the smoke and fire damage was such that it wasn't salvageable," Campbell said. "We stepped forward to design the house and reimagine what it could be."

At the beginning of the process, the family thought they might like to build something very modern. But they soon realized that such a design wouldn't fit with the feel of

the Sunnyside block they had lived on for a decade. "That became interesting for the project," Campbell said. "How do we give the family what they need—a modern house—but also keep it respectful of the neighborhood in terms of its massing and materials?" Their answer was a modern Foursquare, built on the foundation of the old, but tweaked in strategic ways.

To start, the architects expanded the original Foursquare layout into a six-square, adding depth but not width to the building, so that from the sidewalk the house appears to sit much as it did before. Then they nudged up the roof height just 3 feet,



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FROM TOP The Foursquare's living room now flows into the dining and kitchen spaces. The new home's exterior.

Photos: Office 52 Architecture

which enabled them to slip in an occupiable third floor, and insert more bathrooms, bedrooms and storage throughout. The main floor retains the previous Foursquare's room placement, only now the living, dining, and kitchen spaces flow into one another, and a wide tri-fold door opens the interior to the backyard.

A vital alteration to the original Foursquare plan was the location of the staircase. "The stair in the old house had been tucked into the corner by the entry. It was difficult to keep it there because it didn't meet code," Campbell said. The architects moved the staircase to the center of the home and capped it with six skylights in the roof, so that now "light cascades all the way down through the house," Campbell said. "With three kids, it also allows them to hear what's going on between floors." On the third floor, a new laidback family room soaks up the sun, its windows capturing fantastic city views that hadn't previously been accessible in the attic.

Construction finished in 2015, with the new Foursquare's completion a catharsis for the family. "They wanted the new house to have memories of the old house," Campbell said. "It's a house that is respectful of its neighborhood and past, but also forward-looking."

