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FAB COLLAB

With a homeowner who served as his own general contractor, Alexandra Kaehler brought her charming aesthetic to the party.

By Laura Hine // Photography by Aimée Mazzenga

From the beginning, they knew this house would be a challenge, but suspected the end result would be worth the work. The homeowners bought the Lincoln Park home in foreclosure, after the previous owners had begun, but not finished, renovations. "They bought the house midconstruction," says designer Alexandra Kaehler (alexandrakaehler.com), who was brought in during the initial planning phase. "But they had a definite vision of what the house could be." The husband had experience in home renovations, so he served as the project's general contractor, but admits it was a leap. "I had done rehabs before, but not on this scale," he says. "It was a learning curve for sure."

The homeowners added this all-season solarium and adjacent rooftop deck to make their Lincoln Park home a perfect place to entertain or just hang with their kids.

The home has some architectural advantages that helped to make up for the amount of work that was needed. To start with, it's 35 feet wide and has 10-foot ceilings. "The presentation of the house is really nice," says the wife. "It feels more like a home you'd get in the suburbs." The house starts at street level, with a playroom, a home gym with spa bathroom and sauna, and lots of storage. From there, stairs lead to the home's main floor, with a family room, dining room, home office, kitchen with eat-in area and powder room.

"The dining room was originally meant to be a receiving foyer, but that was so much wasted square footage," says Kaehler. "We decided to make it into a dining room, but it still had to be an easy space to walk through because it's the central room on this level." Kaehler accomplished that with a custom-made live-edge table, perfectly proportioned for the room, plus gorgeous upholstered chairs by Empiric Studio that can serve as a space to sit and chat, just as easily as seats for a formal meal. In the family room, which was dark thanks to leaded windows, the couple added a glass door that opens onto a small terrace, which is big enough for a grill. "We made full-length draperies that you can close to make the room very cozy and sophisticated, or open them up and let in some light," says Kaehler. "My hope was that this would be a place they'd hang



From top: The distinct dining room light fixture is the Sorenthia Chandelier by Renovation Room; the kitchen is a light and open space with windows on two sides and features like open shelving and a sleek built-in station housing the coffee bar.

« [The homeowners] had looked at a lot of new-construction homes with these huge, white cookie-cutter kitchens, and that was something they definitely didn't want. »

—DESIGNER ALEXANDRA KAEHLER »

Clockwise from top left: The art on the exposed brick wall is "Life 2" by Ysabel Le May; the family's two children have a playroom and reading nook on the street level; removing an awkward fireplace made the master bedroom's layout much cleaner and more symmetrical.



out with their kids, so we upholstered almost everything with indoor-outdoor fabric, and they use it every day."

When the homeowners bought the house, the one room that was mostly finished was the kitchen, but unfortunately, they hated it. "They had looked at a lot of new-construction homes with these huge, white cookie-cutter kitchens, and that was something they definitely didn't want," says Kaehler. Instead, she had custom cabinets made and finished in a soft gray, put in classic subway tile for the backsplash and used durable quartz for the counters. "They're cooks, so it had to be functional and work for the way they live."

The two upstairs levels were completely redone, from ripping out a poorly placed fireplace in the master bedroom to turning an open space into an inviting guest room. The home's crowning achievement—literally—is on the top level, where the family added a solarium and rooftop deck. "They had a vision of this iron-and-glass structure," says Kaehler. "It wasn't really practical for Chicago, so we mimicked the look with paint." It's a year-round entertaining space with the indoor solarium (complete with a TV that rises from the floor), and the now-finished roof boasts a fire pit, a kids' play area and plenty of space to lounge. Like the rest of the home, it gets used regularly, which was the goal from the beginning. "We knew we were going to be living here for a while," says the husband. "Alex helped us make the right decisions for the longevity of this home." ■