

MAKEOVER ANNIE SELKE

PART 2

Rethinking the Floor Plan

Interview by
DAN SHAW

Annie Selke's transformation continues: How do you rearrange a warren of small rooms into the flowing contemporary space we all want now?

Tell me your first impression of Annie's new house.

JOHN GILMER, architect: Well built and well sited, but sad, dark, and tired. It was a 1960s three-bedroom ranch house, typical of the era: choppy, with no flow from front to back. The bedrooms were small and tight, and most of the rooms had low ceilings and mean little windows.

Yet you saw its potential. Well, the living room did have a nice, high ceiling and decent-sized windows. I thought, 'I just need to do this to the rest of the house.' I knew I had to open it up, bring in light, and connect spaces.

What had you asked for, Annie?

ANNIE SELKE: I wanted a loftlike space. And I wanted my master bedroom and bathroom to feel like a good hotel suite.

JG: In other words—simple, modern, functional.

A single person really only needs three rooms, or three zones: a living room slash TV room slash office. A kitchen slash dining area, and a great bedroom and bath.

How did you unlock the house's potential?

JG: We took out walls. We opened up the public rooms to each other and repurposed them. We put in bigger windows and raised the roof in back.

You raised it in back?

JG: The left side was gabled, with a low slope. The right side was pitched and went straight up from front to back. We made the whole thing one plan. It completely changed the nature of the house. And it

allowed us to raise the bedroom ceilings from 8 feet to 10, which then allowed us to put in larger windows and clerestory windows. It gave the rooms more volume and light. AS: And it dramatically improved the sassy factor! *How did you give Annie her hotel suite?*

JG: We turned one of those small bedrooms into a dressing room and bathroom.

Any other changes that had a major effect on the personality of the house?

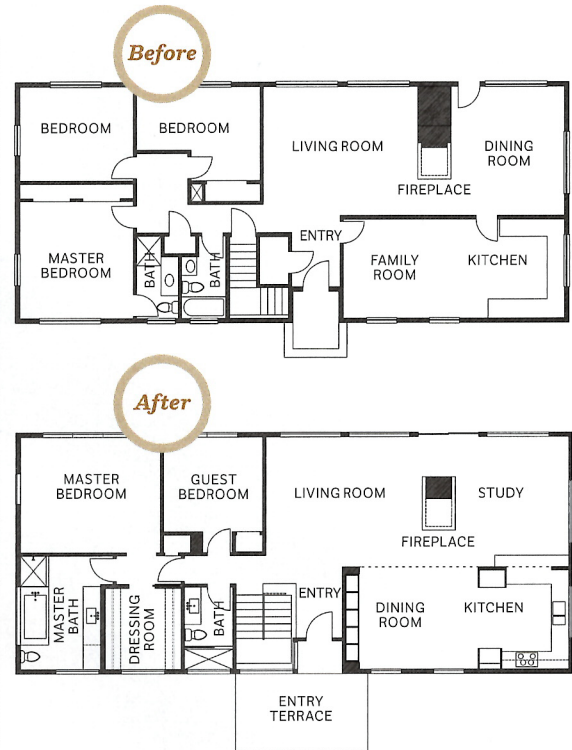
JG: There was a coat closet just inside the front door, and this nasty little stairway going down to the basement. By taking out the closet, we were able to build a bigger stairwell with a floor-to-ceiling window. That threw a huge amount of light into the lower level.

Where did you take out walls?

JG: We took down the wall dividing the living and dining rooms from the family room and kitchen. There was also a huge fireplace that formed an interior wall between the living and dining rooms, because it was connected to the exterior by a cabinet. Now it's a three-sided, freestanding fireplace.

AS: You can enjoy it while you're having cocktails in the living room and study, and when you're having dinner, you can still enjoy it. This open floor plan is so flexible, which is wonderful for entertaining—except that you do have to keep the kitchen cleaner!

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GET IT RIGHT

- Before you dream about tearing down a wall, be sure it's not load-bearing. And find out if it has any mechanical ducts, electrical cables, or plumbing lines in it. Rerouting can be expensive and time-consuming.
- One of the easiest and least expensive ways to add square footage to your house is to use what's already there. "There was a lot of space in the basement, and it didn't require major work to turn it into a suite for Annie's daughter and a desk area for Annie," Gilmer says. "It was just a matter of digging down and putting in bigger windows."
- Stairs should be a minimum of 36 inches wide, but Gilmer thinks 42 inches or wider is better—"much more gracious"—and 48 is "ideal."

1. Architect John Gilmer and Annie Selke. 2. The original fireplace was part of a huge, awkward mess of a wall incorporating a cabinet. 3. Removing the cabinet opened up the living and dining rooms to each other. 4. A dark, narrow stairway to the lower level was enclosed by walls. 5. Walls were taken down, stairs were widened to 39 inches, and windows were put in. Now, light floods the lower level. NEXT MONTH: WINDOWS