

TOP DOCTORS: 292 PHYSICIANS IN 54 SPECIALTIES

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AMY CHERRY, SHANNON FONTAINE, ALYSSA ROSENHECK

Old **MADE NEW**

One couple commits to the ambitious renovation of a 110-year-old Craftsman.

BY KRISTIN LUNA

PHOTOS BY SHANNON FONTAINE

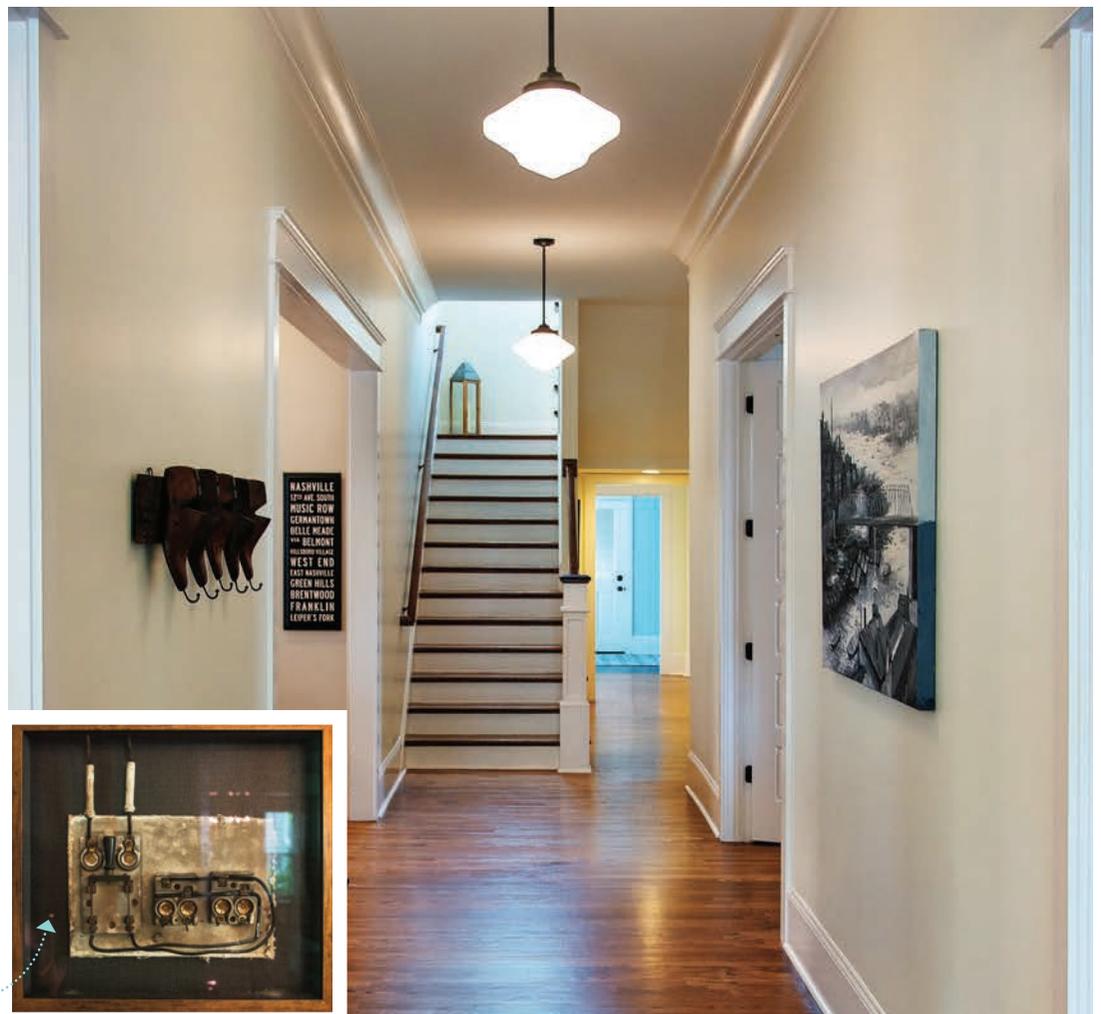


When Chris and Allison Koch moved from the Lipscomb area out to a ranch house in Brentwood several years back, it didn't take long before they started to miss their lives as city dwellers. While they loved their Williamson County neighborhood and its abundance of space for their five-year-old son Connor to enjoy, they missed the verve and walkability of Nashville. So when Chris, owner of Cumberland Property Investments, got a call about a 1905 home in 12 South that the owners were looking to sell, he jumped at the chance.

"We love the energy in this neighborhood," Allison says. "We've always been very social. In our last spot, there weren't a lot of young kids, but here we have a park, and with so many living so close together, you have more opportunities to meet people."

The Kochs managed to acquire the home pretty quickly off-market, but the coming year would prove to be not quite as easy, as they were taking on their most ambitious project to date. The couple, who has renovated more than 30 properties in the three years since they started flipping houses, closed on March 31, moved in on November 7, and still had a team putting the finishing touches on the home through Christmas. All the while, they maintained two mortgages, worked on four other properties to keep a steady flow of capital coming in, and shuttled back and forth between their new 12 South digs and their old Brentwood home until the renovation was complete. >>>

Though the Kochs' house now has a very modern feel, it's also full of remnants from the early 1900s, like an old electrical panel that is framed and mounted in Chris's office, and a trio of pendant lights in the entryway from Bellevue Hospital that they sourced from Preservation Station.





“It was nerve-racking. Renovating this house was akin to competing in the Olympics: We knew we only had one shot to get it right,” Allison says, adding that there was absolutely no wiggle room in the budget if they messed up a single thing.

The Kochs, who specialize in historic preservation, explain that never having lived in the house was an extra road-block, as many homeowners are able to experience the space firsthand and figure out how they function in it before ever knocking down a wall.

One of the changes that made the most impact to the overall feel of the house happened when they opted to open up the entire downstairs. Though the ceilings are high at 11 feet, previously all of the openings had been a single-width doorway with a transom window above each.

“It looked like a bad motel. Each door was directly across from each other, all the way down this long hallway,” recalls Allison, who has a background in counseling and has been designing residential spaces for her husband’s projects for the past eight years. “You didn’t feel the expanse of the [space] with the short doors.”

To remedy this, they lost the transoms and raised the doors to eight feet. Though the red oak floors may look brand new, they are in fact original, as evidenced by subtle pockmarks here and there (though the Kochs did add a stain). They also removed the existing stairwell and built a new one in the back of the ground floor to further enhance the space.

“I’m not living in a museum, but I do want it to feel like I was thoughtful of the changes that I made,” Allison says. “I like it when people say, ‘Now was this here, or did you add this?’ That makes me happy.” >>>

Throughout the house, the Kochs opted to paint the walls in a palette of varying gray hues, like Benjamin Moore’s Gray Owl. “The funny thing is that I used lots of different colors, but they turned out to look very similar—like all one color,” Allison says. “It’s clear to me that my eye likes a certain look. I didn’t do that on purpose.” She adds that when possible they tried to use materials that would have been around in the era the house was built.



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The 15-foot-by-15-foot kitchen was one of the focal points in the downstairs design. Allison took a page from her son's drawing easel to sketch out the kitchen in pencil and scale it to an eighth of an inch. The couple then added new cabinets, appliances, and custom-cut Danube marble countertops from Middle Tennessee Granite.

Upstairs, the Kochs kept the master bedroom pretty true to form but added new red oak floors throughout. The home's existing bathrooms all got complete makeovers with new fixtures and various tile patterns sourced from Mission Stone & Tile. The couple also chose to remove a small bathroom behind the kitchen and replace it with a spacious pantry, relocate the laundry room from downstairs to up, and tack on an addition in the back, increasing the size of the home to 4,252 square feet with a total of five bedrooms and four bathrooms.

The hardest part, Chris admits, was sticking to the timeline and budget, while attempting to simultaneously modernize the house and keep it in the original style.

"We've flipped a lot of houses, but they've never had a budget like this," he explains. "To try to manage and stay in line when there are so many choices and so many items to put into this house when every single one of them has a price tag—that was challenging."

At the end of the day, though, they're extremely happy they invested both the time and the money to give the historic home the attention it deserved—as Allison says, these chances don't come around often.

Adds Chris, "It felt like we owed it to the house to do it back the right way, so we did."

Allison briefly toyed with the idea of painting the mantles white but ultimately wanted to keep them as true to form as possible. "These are the centerpieces for the downstairs. I like that this is exactly what they looked like 100 years ago," she says. The Kochs did install hand-fired tiles from Mission Stone & Tile but chose a style that mimicked the house's period and still fit its character.

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