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HOME DESIGN

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FOLLOW THEM HOME

HOW DESIGN PROS REALLY LIVE

This old new house

Story has it, architect Tony Perry wanted his own home to be perfectly flawed

As lead architect of a firm that builds high-end custom homes, Tony Perry has designed dozens of impressive houses. But when the time came to create a home for his own family, Perry decided to write the house before he drew it.

For the heck of it, Perry gave the new house a backstory, imagining it as having a 120-year history. Just completed in March on a wooded lot in Libertyville, it's intended to look as if it has nestled beneath the old oaks in the neighborhood since about 1880 and been added onto, messed with and upgraded by a succession of owners since then.

He didn't make a Disney-style ersatz historical structure, the kind with a concrete "thatched" roof and painted-on decay. In fact, to the casual viewer the house betrays no obvious signs of old age. But a closer look reveals design details and architectural quirks that diverge from the prevailing standard of new-home perfection.

For example, the windows on the front of the house don't all match. Some are square, others rectangular, still others arched on top. Then there's the odd window in the garage whose top and bottom both arch. The chimneys also seem to reflect the tastes of more than one owner. The original stone appears to be showing through where somebody's later choice, stucco, is falling off. Several large stones are lying in the yard near a ragged corner of the house, seemingly left there after falling off years ago.

These and other intentional imperfections are Perry's way of giving his family's brand-new home the feel of an older, more rooted place.

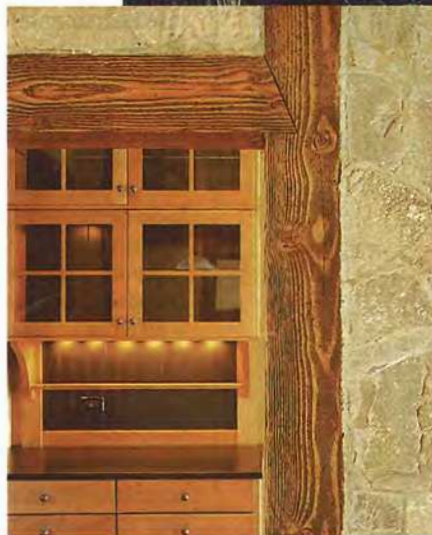
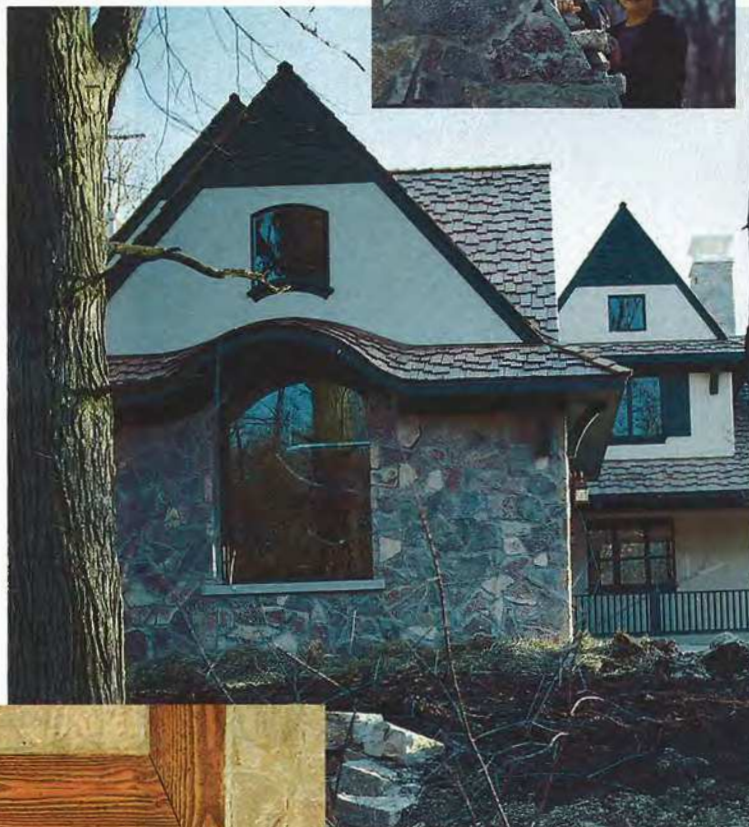
"I appreciate craft. I like things that are handmade, so I wanted to make a house that looked like it was made by hand and stood the test of time," says Perry, 41, the head architect at Orren Pickell Designers and Builders, a prominent firm on the North Shore. "I wasn't trying to make a big, fake Hollywood facade."

He says the imaginary story behind the house goes like this: Sometime before 1880, a settler built a home for his family on a lowland lot in the woods near the country town of Libertyville. As the years have passed and the area has developed, assorted owners have expanded the house, updating all the way, so that now it's a comfortable mix of modern and historic.

The kitchen is a wide-open, lavish spread of cherry cabinets and granite countertops, right out of the pages of any contemporary kitchen magazine. But nearby in the dining room is what appears to be an old stone wall buttressed by heavy timbers to keep it standing, an apparent remnant of the old farmhouse's original interior. Near the front door is a built-in "kissing bench," a relic of a bygone era when suitors might try to sneak a little peck from ladies who lived in the house.

The exterior also was designed to fit the story line. "I wanted the roof to look staggered, like it had been added to and patched over the years, not that perfect, seamless look of a new roof," Perry said

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Top: The wall came tumbling down . . . or did it? Architect Tony Perry, seen here with his wife, Olivia Perry, wanted one corner of their new house to appear to have fallen apart sometime over the past century.

Above: By using assorted shapes and styles of window, Perry suggests that the house was added to several times, with whatever windows were available at the moment.

Left: The rock wall between kitchen and dining area is as brand-new as the rest of the home, but Perry wanted it rough and buttressed by timbers, as if it were a precious relic of the "original" 1880 home.

New house

Continued from page 14

...scently as we stood in
...k-deep mud where
...e driveway would be
...er. "The first part of it
...nt up and it was too
...od for what I wanted. So
...alled the roofer and
...d, "Take your worst
...y, give him two shots of
...ka, and tell him to get
...on the roof and do the
...as fast as possible.
...at's how bad I want it to
...k." "The roofer didn't
...nt to put a tipsy worker
...a roof, but he got the
...essage and loosened the
...ndards for this job. The
...ult is a cedar-shingled
...of that looks a little off
...tidy finish of most new
...ofs.

Perry's idea for his house's instant
story came partly from the loca-
tion, an undeveloped two-acre lot in
a small enclave of upscale houses
franked on three sides by Old School
Forest Preserve. He says he felt
obliged to suit the house to its old
and woody surroundings.



Perry surveys the expansive woodland behind his new house from a broad, sunny great room. Perry forbade tradespeople from being fussy about straight lines (as in the tile work at right) and finicky finishes.



HOW TO GET THE LOOK

- **Ease up on the formality.** If the houses that appeal to you most are beach shacks, point your architect that way.
- **Don't worry about uniformity.** "When you mix and match, and patch old things, every part has its own little story it could tell you," Perry says.
- **Write your own story, if you like.** What tales would you want your home to tell? Family's travels, your ethnic traditions, your fondness for nature? When choosing anything from slipcovers to a room addition, keep those stories in your mind.

A bigger factor is Perry's own
polyglot taste in residential architec-
ture. "Whatever style a client wants
me to design in becomes the style I
love most for that period," he says.
"I'm like a Don Juan for houses."

His wandering eye meant he
couldn't stick to one look. A house

that appeared to have evolved
through several looks would "keep
me interested longer," he says.

Olivia Perry notes that her hus-
band, like a lot of architects, "has
always had plans around for the
house he wanted to build for us. It's
been 100 completely different houses

over the years, at least." The one he has finally put up is "the right thing for our family," she says, "because we tell each other a lot of stories."

Guiding visitors through the house just before it was completed, Perry sounded as if the whole project was play-time for him. He found a way to memorialize his three kids—Anthony, 17, Stephanie, 14, and Hillary, 13—in the second-floor laundry room by laminating their photos right into the countertop. The projecting bay in his office hangs just a foot or so over the allowable building line "just because I'm the guy who if you tell me I can't build there, I'll find a way to make it look like I did anyway." The kissing bench, he's sure, will get ample use from his daughters and their dates, but he also points out that it's within earshot of his office. □

Dennis Rodkin is a frequent contributor to the Magazine.

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