

# SPLASH *home*

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## INSIDE

A KITCHEN'S  
CONTEMPORARY  
UPDATE

A FOODIE'S  
DEERFIELD  
FAVORITES  
& MORE

## BREATHTAKING *in Barrington Hills*

A MODERN FIVE-BEDROOM STUNNER  
PLUS, THE HOTTEST REHABS ON THE NORTH SHORE MARKET



feature

# HOME improvement

Four North Shore listings with breathtaking renovations — and how to give your current digs a face-lift

BY ASHLEY DEVICK

A good floorplan or facade can mean the difference between an all-out teardown (or even moving) and a more manageable home renovation. “If you’ve got [a house with] good bones to start, and it’s attractive from an exterior standpoint, in most [cases] it can be corrected,” says **Orren Pickell**, president and CEO of Orren Pickell Building Group in Northfield (550 Frontage, Northfield; [Pickellbuilders.com](http://Pickellbuilders.com)).

A bit of savvy design can go a long way — as long as the task list stays within reason. Warns Pickell: “If the scope of the project gets too large, you get into the question of whether the renovations are worth it.” He suggests doing your homework. A good realtor can help you figure out how marketable the home will be post-project, and advise on whether the expense of a project translates to increased home value.

Beyond aesthetic preferences, some issues can negatively impact a home’s value and should be corrected no matter what. These are called super flaws, says Pickell, and include things like a bad kitchen, little or no family room, lack of a master suite, small closets and inefficient garages.

“Think about how you live,” Pickell says. “The most annoying things to [buyers] are the mundane things you deal with every day, like dinging your garage door because the garage is too small, or having to walk down the hall to get to your closet.” Those details can be remedied — often by pulling space from less functional areas of the house or building an addition.

Outside of super flaws, Pickell suggests starting with curb appeal, making easy updates to things like landscaping and paint. “If you don’t want to go through a major headache, use color to attract the eye where you want people to look.” This can be done with colorful flowers, a new front door or a fresh coat of paint.

We found four North Shore homes adhering to all the renovation rules.



## &lt; Years in the making

## 921 RIDGE IN EVANSTON, \$1.15 MILLION

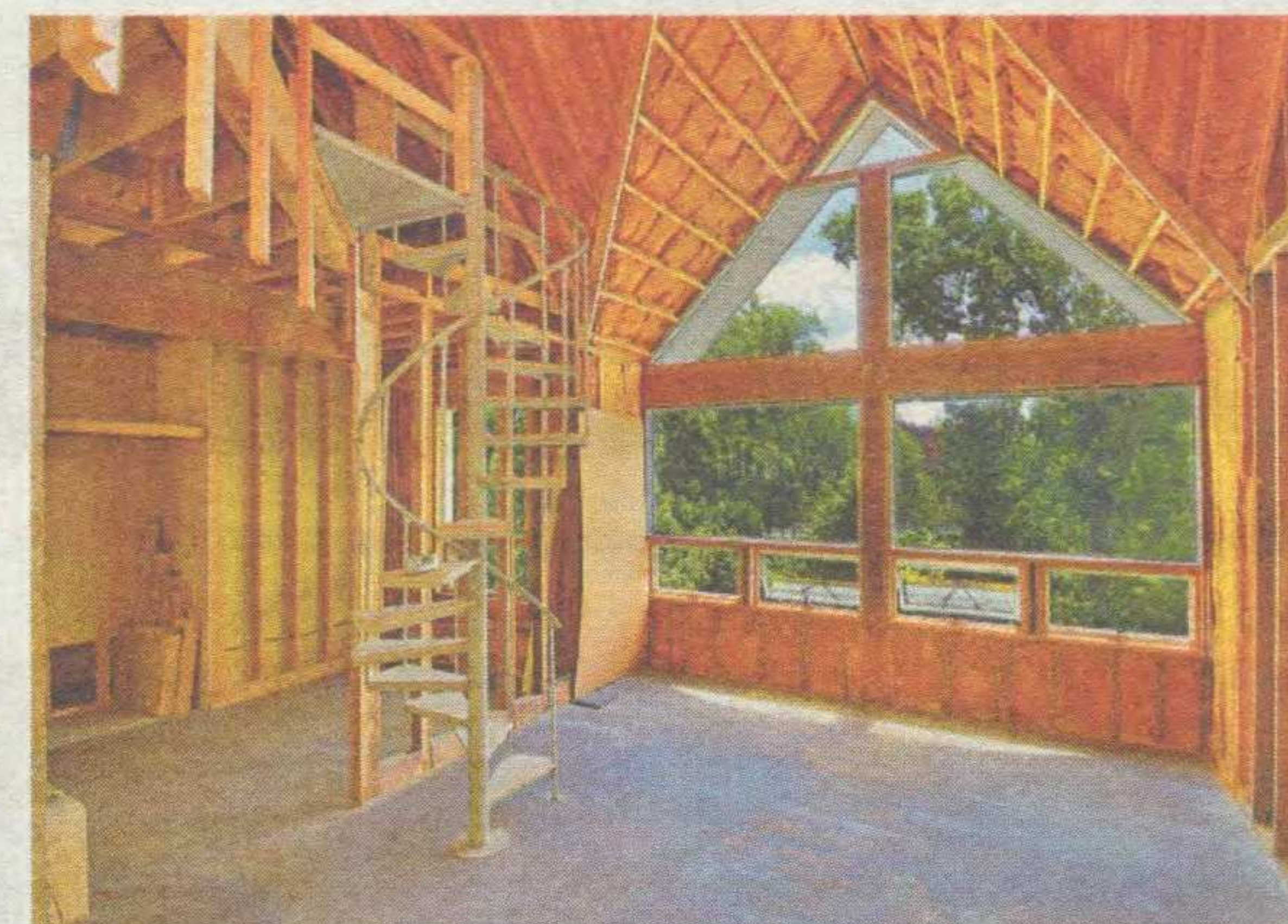
Some renovation projects take longer than others, and for the owners of 921 Ridge, this project was a labor of love. The home has been undergoing renovations for the past four decades, resulting in a complete transformation. The Victorian era home was built on three city lots in 1880 — its coach house was actually meant for a horse and buggy — and since, under ownership of an internationally-renowned designer, has been completely overhauled.

Kicking off the most recent stretch of renovations in the 1990s, the coach house was restored and rebuilt to include a gorgeous three-bay garage, with a storage room and 900 square feet of space that could be used as an apartment, studio or workout room. While the exterior is finished, the interior is raw, and can be completed to fit the tastes and preferences of its buyer.

After tackling the coach house, the owner went to work on the main house. He redid the roof by hand using high-quality materials like copper gutters with lead coating. The studs, floorboards and windows have been updated, leaving a perfect palette for a buyer to customize.

"The inside is pretty much raw space," says realtor **Lynne Heidt** (@properties, call 847-417-4190). "[A buyer] has a 99.6 percent finished exterior, but will have to put his own rooms, finishes and appliances inside." Once finished, the home could be four or five bedrooms with 3.5 bathrooms.

"You have this 1880s house, ready for the 21st century, ready to do yourself," says Heidt. >



**Pictured opposite: The 900-square-foot space above the garage at 921 Ridge in Evanston is perfect for a rental apartment, studio or gym.**

## PICKELL'S FAVORITE FIX-UPS:



AFTER



BEFORE

Pickell recently gave this Kenilworth home a face-lift, starting with the facade. Inside, he preserved the structure but redesigned the floorplan, reviving rooms such as the kitchen (shown).



BEFORE



AFTER