

Old House, New Look



By **Helen S. Levy**
Photography by **Judy Lawrence**



When Helen Anderson moved from the East Coast to Jackson, Wyoming, she was looking for the home of her dreams—an old ranch house or log house with lots of charm. “I didn’t move out West to live in a condo or a gated community,” she says.

She had no idea that her quest would lead her to one of the town’s oldest, most historic homes. This log house (built in the 1920s), which once belonged to one of Jackson’s most prominent ranching families, had fallen upon hard times. “No one even considered showing it,” she says. “I found it myself and walked all around it pecking into the windows. When I got to the kitchen and peeked in, it looked like there should be custard cooling on the counters. In fact, it looked a lot like my grandma’s house.”

Helen bought the cabin, moved in and started restoring the chinking and doing all the things necessary to make it habitable. Then she replaced the windows to give the cabin a more authentic look. “The previous owner had changed out the old windows and installed picture windows,” she says, “and since I have always had an appreciation for historic preservation, I wanted my home to be as close to the original look as possible.”

A DYED-IN-THE-WOOD EASTERNER MOVES TO JACKSON, WYOMING AND FALLS IN LOVE WITH A LONG-NEGLECTED BUT CHARMING CABIN.

The 1920s log cabin (on the right) is connected with the addition by a new, all-purpose sitting room (on the left). The design of the addition mimics the look of the original cabin.



The interior, above, top and bottom, got a complete makeover. Helen painted the walls a bright citrus and made the river rock fireplace the focal point of this room.

Because the home was built for the prominent and prosperous Gill family, the inside walls of the cabin were not made out of logs but were plastered. "Plaster walls were unusual in log cabins when this house was built," says Helen. "It was a rich person's thing to do." But the walls were in bad shape and needed to be replastered before she could start to work on the large garden.

After Helen moved into her little home, friends from the East Coast began coming for extended visits—to ski in the winter and to hike and fish in the summer. "I guess you could say the entire addition started because we're all too old to sleep on pull out couches," she says.

That may be how it started, but by the time it was over, Helen had two guest bedrooms and an all-purpose room. She also remodeled her bedroom ("It was plastered in fake adobe and the bed was on a built-in platform.") and bath ("I just couldn't

stand that tiny 'Motel 6' tub anymore."). "After all," she says, "I waited a long time to live in a proper house and wanted it to be really nice."

Stephen Dynia is the architect she chose to do the work on her little cabin. It was a love/hate/love relationship from beginning to end. "He considers himself a true modernist," she says, "but he's also a real kindred spirit."

"The historic house we started with had substantial architectural detail," says Stephen. "This was a civilized log bungalow

The updated dining room, above, retains the character of the original, left, but with a new bright and clean look.



“This was a civilized log bungalow with somewhat fancy interior and exterior trim.”

with somewhat fancy interior and exterior trim. It had a much higher level of finish than many crude, frontier-like structures still standing in Jackson from that era.”

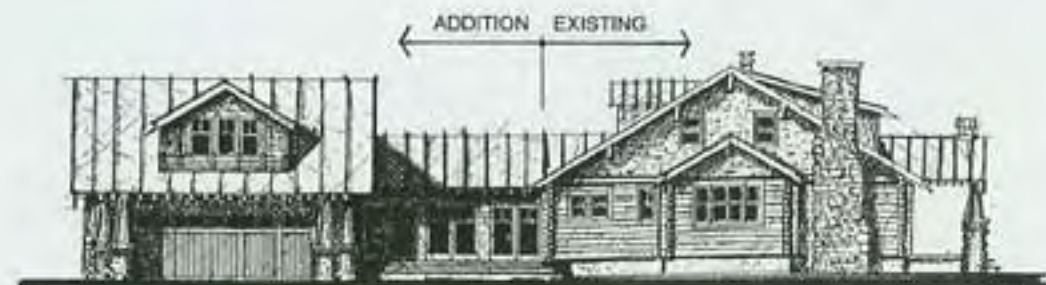
In his first meetings with Helen to discuss the project, Stephen’s design team considered many different strategies. One was to build a contemporary addition—one that would reflect the new, modern tastes of this former frontier town.

“Most of Stephen’s projects before and since have been contemporary,” says Helen, “but I wanted something traditional.” Stephen remembers that Helen was very fond of the quaintness of the original house, “so we mimicked many of the details of the old cabin.”

The goal was to maintain the intimate scale of the early house while nearly doubling the interior space. Part of making the project work was a careful look at the site plan. The house is built on three lots and the yard included a wonderful little gazebo with a fireplace which Helen wanted to keep intact. The garage was built as a honeymoon cabin for Ralph Gill, the son of the original owner. “I didn’t want to attach any of that to the old house in any way that

While adding, renovating and remodeling, the design team worked hard to retain the charm and quaintness of the original 1920s log cabin.





We combined the rich heritage of lodgepole with Arts & Crafts style.

would have altered its proportions," says Stephen. "So we left it alone and built a new bungalow behind it with a roof line that mirrors the original."

He continues: "The new bungalow has a sunroom as a connector to the original. This allows the original structure to maintain its identity. The interiors abound with inglenooks and niches while the exterior details reflect the care of the original builders."

"I truly began to visualize Stephen's ideas after he built and presented them in a scale model," says Helen. "Then I could see that the vision he had was going to work with my idea of having a historic log cabin big enough to entertain friends yet intimate enough to feel comfortable when I wasn't entertaining a crowd."

Stephen offers the following advice for anyone considering remodeling and renovating an existing home:

- Evaluate the cost differences between demolition and new construction versus retrofitting.
- Decide how much of the existing home should be saved and make sure what you're saving is *really* worth saving.
- Have a clear vision for what you're trying to achieve. Work with an architect and/or designer to determine the most practical way of going about this.
- Choose a trustworthy builder to be a member of your team. Realize that, despite everyone's best efforts, you just can't know what you'll find when you start remodeling an old home. ▲



The new sunroom, left, and, during construction, right, connects the original house with the new guest rooms and exercise room. The architect recreated details of the old cabin in the design of the addition.