



*Linda White's parents might have trouble recognizing their daughter's house the next time they visit - it's taken a 90-degree about-face.*

*Until last November, the 50-year-old Bethesda, Md., Dutch Colonial that Linda shares with her husband, Doug, and daughter, Stephanie, sat parallel to the street. Today, the house and its two-car garage face the street. Interestingly, reorienting the house was not the top priority. Creating additional space was. "Both sets of our parents are elderly, and we don't know if we'll need extra room for them," Linda White said. "But after looking at larger homes in the area, we found it would be less expensive to renovate than to move." Indeed, homeowners often find that spending even several hundred thousand dollars on remodeling costs results in a lower total investment than buying a comparable home. That's not to say that there aren't some good deals to be made if buyers aren't too choosy about condition and location. "But beautifully cared for houses in close-in neighborhoods are hard to secure affordably in today's market," said Kate Wise, sales manager of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase office of Long & Foster Real Estate.*

*Of course, no one can guarantee that homeowners will recoup their remodeling expenses when they sell. But paying careful attention to your home's exterior makes it more attractive to potential buyers - and draws them through the front door to see the home's interior. "People often don't want to even look at a house that lacks curb appeal," said Haidee Adkins, a real estate agent with Remax Premier in Fairfax, Va. "Even if it's a house they should consider." Real estate agents say the level of curb appeal differentiates each house from its neighbors. It's an important element to consider when any remodeling or construction is done. Builders agree. "Whenever we can simultaneously add space and improve the curb appeal of the home, the return on the investment will be greater than if we just add space. It's a much more efficient use of money," said Rob Maggin of Paramount Construction, an architectural and building firm based in Rockville, Md. "Just adding new space without solving the problems of the existing home usually is not the best investment, even in this market. The challenge is to spend your money for the right spaces in the right places of the home, while eliminating the negative and accentuating the positive features of the property." A home's exterior cannot be underestimated in terms of pulling power, Maggin said. "Curb appeal is the number one feature that sells homes today. So if you just add on to a 1950s home without improving the curb appeal, from the street it's still a 1950s home," he said.*

*The first architect the Whites consulted drew up plans for a routine expansion. The suggested addition gave them the space they needed, but left them wanting. Then, when a Paramount architect proposed the house's 90-degree reorientation, it caught the couple completely off guard. But they loved the idea once it sank in. "Looking at the site in a different way let us take advantage of the property's assets - the trees and the pool," Maggin said. "We took a functionally obsolete property and gave it a lot of attractiveness to the owners and to the market." Originally, the upper level had three bedrooms and two full baths. A fourth bedroom and full bath were in the basement. Now, there are four bedrooms and three full baths upstairs. The master bedroom suite features a three-corner fireplace, a spa bath and a private balcony. The main level features a new library and formal living room. The old living room is now the family room. The kitchen, already remodeled after the Whites moved in 12 years ago, required only minor reconfiguration. Gone is the split foyer. In its place is a clear view of the back yard through a set of French doors. The living room is to the right of the front entry, balanced by the staircase to the upper level on the left. The newly enlarged basement accommodates additional closets and the adjoining garage. The former basement bedroom is now an office. Paramount transformed the all-brick exterior by installing a banded facade. Adding lightweight concrete shingles to the home's upper third, and cultured stone to the lower third, has given the house an "arts and crafts" feel that mimics many new homes in the Washington area. Then there's the porch. Adorned with five tapered fiberglass columns, it has the inviting look of simple elegance. The porch, as well as the triangular soffit on the second-floor wall, adds richness and interest to the otherwise flat plane.*

*Many homeowners plan more modest additions than the Whites. This often causes them to underestimate the importance of curb appeal, according to Bob Gallagher, president of the metropolitan Washington chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, and co-owner of Sun Design Remodeling Specialists. "When you add on to a home, you're 90 percent there, and just a little more work, even simple touches, can create a big impact," he said. "It's up to the professional to help guide the client to achieve more than just function." Gallagher explained different ways to enhance curb appeal when adding on to a home. Repeating architectural details, such as columns or pediments, ties an addition to the existing house. Introducing new materials, on the other hand, can create synergy.*

# EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

By Susan Lazanov

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*Just how well an addition integrates into the existing house also is a function of communication among the homeowner, designer and builder. "Oftentimes homeowners feel that their plans don't warrant a designer," Gallagher said. "But they're paying for the design phase anyway and may be leaving a wonderful service on the table." Homes with existing additions also can be spruced up to create a better first impression. New siding, a wraparound porch or a window wall are relatively inexpensive ways to make a major impact on the home's visual flow. Remodeling their house meant that the Whites lived out of boxes in a rented house for six months. But if they had it to do over again, they say they would.*

*A top-rated school district, easy Metro subway access, shops and restaurants within walking distance had attracted them to the area in the first place. Those were same reasons they wanted to stay. "Our original house had some good features, so we didn't want to tear it down," Doug White said. "But it certainly lacked outside charm."*



**Left: The new front exterior of the home. Inset: The White residence prior to any remodeling effort by Paramount Construction.**

**Right: Close-up view of the home's classic new front entrance, including a stone retaining wall and dramatic flagstone walkway.**

