



The Forsythes' saga

Family achieves a seamless addition to their charming older home

By Bob Masullo -- Bee Staff Writer Published 2:15 a.m. PDT Saturday, August 2, 2003

The small east Sacramento home was considered quite a charmer when it was built 70 years ago. Today it's even more so.

That's because John and Lisa Anne Forsythe, the latest in a long string of owners, recently expanded it by 375 square feet to 1,745 square feet -- with the new addition meticulously matching the existing house, both inside and out.

"Since we bought the house seven years ago, we've had two children, so we really needed more room," explains Lisa Anne.

"We love the home and the neighborhood and didn't really want to move, but before deciding to do the expansion, we did look at larger homes," Lisa Anne says. "We even put in an offer on one in Del Dayo Estates. That fell through, though, and we considered that a sign that we should stay put."

John, a project manager for Environmental Science Association, says he favored buying a new home but was pleased when Lisa Anne -- who runs her own Web design business, Distinguished Solutions, out of their home -- came up with the idea to expand the house.

"She favored putting on a second floor, but when we ran the numbers, we found the cost prohibitive. We agreed then on keeping the project to one floor and just eating up a little bit of our back yard for it," John says.

The project added a master bedroom, bathroom and family room to the rear of the home.

Other improvements included updating the kitchen with new appliances and a polished granite countertop. The back yard was re-landscaped, and a brick patio and circular path were installed.

Two architects -- Christopher Manson-Hing of Santa Barbara and Manuel S. Tsihlas of Sacramento -- worked on the addition.

Manson-Hing, who was recommended to the Forsythes by a neighbor, has a nationwide reputation for projects involving older, often historic homes.

"I find them interesting to deal with," he said on the phone from Santa Barbara. "And I liked this particular one because it was originally a model home (see page 17) and has been well-cared-for over the years. I also liked the enthusiasm of the Forsythes. They sincerely love the property and the area it's in and are very astute, very hands-on clients, especially Lisa Anne. She really knows how to use the Internet to find odd items, such as antique heating grills and knobs for drawers and cabinets."

Lisa Anne says Tsihlas was brought into the project "because we needed a local architect who could be on the scene, to deal with little problems as they came up and who knew the local regulations and how to deal with them."

Tsihlas said he was happy to get involved. He, too, likes working on older homes. He was especially pleased that the Forsythes "wanted a seamless addition" to their home.

"I love new and innovative architecture, but I don't like to see it tacked on to a 1930s house," says Tsihlas.

His main job was "to verify that what Chris (Manson-Hing) was doing designwise was actually possible on the ground."



John, Lisa Anne and 4-month-old Blaine Forsythe.

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Owen Brewer

Most decisions that were required as the project progressed were made "by committee" with Tsihlas, Manson-Hing and Lisa Anne Forsythe. Manson-Hing visited the property only once; all other contacts were by phone or e-mail.

Work began in January and was completed in June. The Forsythes rented an apartment during construction.

"Although that increased the overall expense, renting the apartment was definitely worth it just to maintain our sanity, especially since I was pregnant during much of the time," says Lisa Anne (son Blaine was born 4 months ago; big brother Dillon is 3). "I highly recommend doing the same to anyone contemplating a major remodel."

Jim Bristow of Lewis & Bristow Builders was the general contractor. He says he found the project "as close to problem-free as you can get." Only several delays caused by rain bothered him. "But they're to be expected when you work in the winter," he adds.

The new family room and master bedroom have hardwood floors that match the flooring in the older part of the house. Both rooms also have French doors leading to the patio. The family room has a gas-burning fireplace that resembles an old-fashioned wood-burning fireplace (similar to one in the living room). The new bedroom has a bay window with seating over storage space.

The master bathroom mimics the style of the original bathroom with a pedestal sink, wooden wainscoting and antique heating grills that are actually vents for the heating/cooling system.

The Forsythes unsuccessfully tried to match the large octagonal tile flooring in the new bathroom with that in the old bathroom.

"I did find one place that would make them to order, but the cost was ridiculous," says Lisa Anne. So the new bathroom has square floor tiles, about the only detail in the new part that's different from the old.

"But who would know?" says Lisa Anne with a wry smile, "except us."



The Forsythes' new master bath achieves a look consistent with the age of the house. Lisa Anne Forsythe had hoped to install octagonal floor tiles, but the price was prohibitive.

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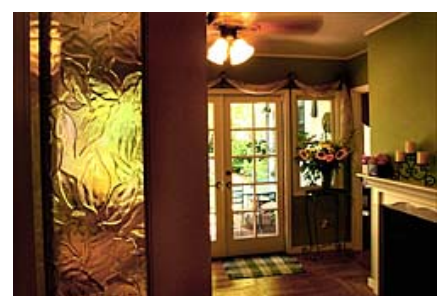
Hardwood flooring in the new master bedroom matches that in the original part of the house. The architects involved in the project applauded the family's decision to make the addition resemble the existing house as much as possible. "I love new and innovative architecture, but I don't like to see it tacked on to a 1930s house," says Manuel S. Tsihlas.



The back yard, re-landscaped and a bit smaller than before, has a brick patio accessible from the master bedroom (at left), the family room and the laundry room.



An arched doorway, part of the original home, gives a framed view of the dining room and, beyond it, the new family room.



Pocket doors between the dining room and the new family room contain glass with a lacy leaf pattern, adding texture, color and interest to the space.