

Back on the Ranch

After living the condo life for years, a homeowner returns to his mid-century roots, in a sublimely transformed house in Birmingham

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Floral styling by Chelsea Smith/FAD



NEW LIFE: The former kitchen gets an updated shot in the arm with a nifty banquette in an Osborne & Little fabric (that was stain-treated). It replaces the need for chairs. Note the handy storage space and fresh, white accent pieces.



Mike Webster grew up in a custom 3,000-square-foot Lathrup Village ranch home with lots of built-ins and a kitchen equipped with all the gee-whiz appliances of the early 1960s — including a wall-mounted horizontal refrigerator/freezer and a finished basement with a fireplace and built-in wet bar.

Coming full circle, after a career in automotive engineering and life in a small condo, Webster has returned to the living style of his youth: a ranch — although it's less sprawling than his childhood home. Nestled into a Birmingham street lined with similarly diminutive post-World War II dwellings, the home has lots of light and top-of-the-line everything.

“I didn’t want a big home,” Webster says, “but I wanted all the amenities.” When he first looked at the house, he knew the architecture was perfect, but the insides had to go. He didn’t want it to be ultra-modern stark; he just wanted quality. After a recommendation from a friend, a year-long collaboration began with designers Ann Heath from Duncan Fuller Interiors and Carly Callahan of Callahan Interiors (members of Forest Avenue Design management company), along with Templeton Building Co., Cole Wagner Cabinetry, and Charlie Olsen of Cornerstone Design and Construction Co.

The team gutted the kitchen, removed the bathroom tiles and tub, moved walls, took out a little vestibule near the front door, turned two bedrooms into one, added four feet to the rear of the structure, and extended the roof. Webster wanted the basement added to the useful square footage, so the team opened up the stairway for maximum natural light, created a fully insulated and drywalled living area, and added a laundry room/kitchenette with cupboards, a bedroom with an egress window and full bath, and a modern utility room that includes HVAC, an emergency generator, and a tankless hot water heater.

TANS & GRAYS: *This page:* Cole Wagner Cabinetry built-ins optimize the limited space in the living room, which features a wall for storage, books, and art. The sofa is a Holly Hunt outdoor velvet; chairs and ottoman are from Manuel Canovas; the rug is from Stark. *Opposite page, top:* The team removed a little vestibule near the front door and opened the space to accommodate chairs and art. *Bottom:* Beyond editing the homeowner’s existing furnishings, the designers added masculine pieces like the two ottoman cubes in the master bedroom. The shams, coverlet, and ottomans are all from Ralph Lauren. Covered in gray tweeds, the ottomans remind the homeowner of a Ralph Lauren suit.





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“He checked on the house every day — he was very detail-oriented and involved,” Callahan says of the owner. “He was a team player,” adds Heath. “Quality was the most important thing.”

On both levels of the home, LED lighting, white walls punctuated with elegant wainscoting, and custom cabinetry create a serene and spacious feeling — nothing like the mid-century interiors of yore, with their dark-stained (or knotty pine) décor. The result of the renovation is more Prairie than Nifty Fifties. Aside from some of the furnishings, the only dark elements are the front door and the original white oak flooring, which are stained a similar shade.

Throughout the house, Cole Wagner built-ins optimize the limited space: There’s a wall in the living room for storage, books, and art; a banquette in the kitchen replaces a table and chairs; shelving surrounds the master bedroom’s queen bed, which sits on a custom platform; and drawers in the closet eliminate the need for a dresser.

Using a single shade of white paint with a hint of gray as the backdrop, the designers installed 4-inch LED can ceiling lights throughout the home, along with individual picture lights to illuminate the shelving in the living room. They edited Webster’s existing furnishings and added others covered in masculine gray tweeds, like the two ottomans in the master bedroom that remind Webster of a Ralph Lauren suit, and the herringbone sectional sofa in the basement’s family room that’s paired with his red leather chair.

Eschewing the idea to do big changes to the home’s exterior, Webster insisted it had to echo the modest nature of the neighborhood. “He

MASCULINE MOTIF: *This page:* The basement bath has black-and-white porcelain tile, a Restoration Hardware vanity and mirror, a Kohler faucet, and a Euro Glass shower door. *Opposite page, top:* To create spaciousness in the living and dining rooms, walls were removed. The stairway was opened to bring in natural light. *Bottom:* A herringbone sofa in the basement is a favorite perch for the homeowner.





NEW LIFE: *Clockwise from top:* The home's original lines are enhanced with a faux-slate-tile roof, copper half-round gutters, and manicured boxwoods. Note the prized garage, with its dark-stained wooden door that matches the home's front door. In the back, new French doors open to the simple bluestone patio and inviting greenery. Interior designers Carly Callahan and Ann Heath (members of Forest Avenue Design management company) enjoy the back patio on a recent afternoon.

was 100 percent right," Callahan says. Instead, the team enhanced the original lines with a faux-slate-tile roof, copper half-round architectural gutters, and all-new bronze windows that range from a tiny half-size to a floor-to-ceiling expanse that doubles the light and amplifies the space. New French doors open to the patio. The landscaping is simple and geometric, with boxwoods in front; in the rear, the brick-wall-flanked bluestone patio looks out at a small green lawn with a single brick pedestal that is awaiting a piece of art. Then there's the handsome garage, with its dark-stained wooden door that matches the home's front door. The garage is the reason Webster wanted the house over a condo in the first place. Not because it was fabulous — in fact, it was completely rebuilt with bricks that match his house — but because of Webster's affinity for working on vintage convertibles. There was no place for Webster to tinker at the condo; now, his two-plus-car garage features a sleek epoxy floor and is climate-controlled to protect his "babies." The retired tool and die shop owner has pared his collection of restored cars down to two shiny Chevy convertibles: A light blue 1965 Impala and a creamy yellow 1967 Malibu, which he now proudly houses in his garage.

Webster says he's completely happy with the home's makeover. "I'm a single person," he says. "I have no visions of moving from the area and buying a house in Florida. This is my last hurrah." ■

Adding Nuance

Small details make a big impact, whether a classic car lover's garage, new lighting, or even a cool mailbox.



IN THE DETAILS: Clockwise from upper left: One of the homeowner's prized Chevy beauties, kept in his renovated garage; the address is inlaid in stone, above a unique mailbox from Russell Hardware in Bloomfield Hills; a Bevelo light fixture looks handsome on existing stone that the homeowner wanted to preserve; books from the homeowner's collection; the master bath's marble Carrera subway tile with a black-and-white basketweave floor; and master bedroom bedding that features stripes and tweeds in charcoals and grays.

