

To: Steve  
From: Maria  
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## SPECIAL AFFECTIONS



Christobel Perez photos / Chronicle

Maria Devlin dreamed for decades of owning the Eastwood house, once a rectory for the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer.

### HOME DESIGN

## Couple's dream alive in restored 1913 home

By Deborah Mann Lake



The Craftsman-Prairie house was built in 1913.

It was Maria Devlin's dream house at a nightmare time of her life. Three days after she and husband John Devlin closed on the Eastwood home they had wanted for two decades, John was diagnosed with a terminal disease, leaving Maria to face an extensive renovation of the 1913 structure without his help.

"When John was really ill, a lot of times it was overwhelming, and after the workers would leave I would cry," Devlin said. "It was a place where I felt I could let it all out. The walls had seen so much, they could understand."

On a chilly evening two years later, the renovation was complete, and although John was not there to see it, the walls enclosed a happier scene — Devlin, her

children, her extended family and friends, 15 in all, feasting on burritos while sitting around a massive table made of exotic heavy timbers. Once a week, there's a standing invitation for anyone to drop by for dinner in the big kitchen Devlin always wanted.

Maria and John Devlin first saw the home nearly 25 years ago while working as volunteers on what was then the rectory of Church of the Redeemer, an Episcopal parish a block away. Maria had arrived in Houston in 1973, at age 18, to visit her uncle Abdias Avalos, Redeemer's first Spanish priest. Church families at that time lived "in community" in homes throughout the neighborhood, pooling their resources.

In 1976, unknown to each other, Maria was toiling in the attic while John was working in a guest bedroom. It didn't take long to meet, and three years later they married. John became an attorney, and the couple had four children: Michael, Laura, Deborah and John Mark. From time to time they "adopted" other

children, and Maria still considers them family. They include Michael Reed and Joshua Word, regulars at the lively, noisy open kitchen gatherings.

The church sold the home nearly two decades ago. But Maria never forgot it. "We were either going to buy this house or move to San Antonio," she said. "For both of us, it was our dream house. John was not able to enjoy it, but our dream has to go on."

Before Maria could start on the kitchen, the heart of her dream, several fundamental problems had to be corrected.

The previous owners had let the house fall into semi-decay. Rotted wood inside and out had to be replaced. A roof leak in a second-floor bedroom closet had caused extensive damage. The overhanging eaves, a signature detail of the home, were beginning to droop. Chunks of the dining room plate rail were missing.

"One of the biggest things was matching the interior architectural detailing," said Chris Fry of Dovetail Builders, who



Devlin serves her guests, who have gathered for a midweek feast.



Kevin Fujii photos / Chronicle

The Devlin house is filled with family and friends during a weekly Wednesday open-house dinner around a prized table in the thoroughly modern kitchen.



Decades of paint were removed from the living and dining rooms.



Wood trim in the bedrooms was painted for a less formal look.

restored the home. "We had to custom-make trim pieces and doors of cypress wood to match the original."

The home is a fine example of Craftsman and Prairie architecture with an echo of Victorian in the handsome pocket doors and upstairs transoms that circulated air in the days before air conditioning. Despite a remodeling in the '70s, the house had most of its original built-ins, from bookcases and window seats in the living room to a cabinet in the dining room. In front of the fireplaces in the living and dining rooms, the home still had old coal-fireplace embossed metal screens, a feature normally lost through time and modernization. Fry rebuilt the interiors of the fireplaces and converted them to gas.

"It was so inviting with the wood floors, high ceilings, fireplaces and front porch. To me it was the perfect house. I came from a dysfunctional family, and I wanted a place of refuge, a place to feel safe," Devlin said. "Even when I lived here for two weeks alone before the children moved in, I was never afraid to be by myself. It was like God's spirit was here."

Fry's challenge was to restore, not necessarily remodel. To take off decades of paint from the original wood in the living and dining rooms, large dipping vats of paint remover were built on site. All of the original windows were repaired with new cords and balanced weights. Over the years, some of the old, wavy glass in the home's windows had been replaced with newer glass. Fry found a source for "old float glass" so that all of the windows would match.

"The old-style glass is actually being remanufactured for historical-preservation jobs because it matches the original, which has so much more character," Fry said.

"I could have cut a lot of corners," Devlin said. "But even though worn out, the beauty of the home was still there. It just needed somebody to come and polish it and make it shine again, come alive again."

Fry did some remodeling to open up the dining room and a connecting hallway to the kitchen. She also updated an addition built in the '70s that included a larger kitchen, a sunroom and several upstairs rooms at the rear of the home.

"One of the biggest challenges was the floor plan upstairs — getting three bathrooms in the available space and matching all the woodwork with the original home," Fry said.

The team also included Nancy Ganucheau of That's Architecture, who worked with Devlin on bathroom and kitchen design as well as finishes and color throughout the home.

"We wanted to make the bathrooms fit in like they had always been there," Ganucheau said.

Keeping the large family in mind, Ganucheau divided a hall bathroom into two toilet spaces, a sink area and a bathtub room.

While the wood downstairs was stripped of all paint, sanded and stained,



Collectibles add a personal touch.

the wood trim upstairs was painted to be less formal, Ganucheau said. Carpeting upstairs was replaced with recycled wood from old warehouses, and floors throughout the home were waxed rather than varnished to give them a softer, aged appearance.

The kitchen was a challenge. An 8-foot ceiling was removed, and the weight of the second-floor addition, braced by the remaining portion of a wall in the middle of the room, had to be shifted to exterior walls and reinforced. Devlin chose beaded board for the ceiling, and Ganucheau found just the right stone, Brazilian Atlantic green slate, for the countertop. The painted cabinets were done in the same soft green.

Although the kitchen is thoroughly modern, including a trash compactor and recycling center, the simple design and hardware match the Craftsman spirit of the original home.

A hobby/garage cottage was added on the home's large lot, and doors that were removed in the kitchen remodeling were recycled there. Devlin said the boys got to the garage before her car did, and there are now game tables on the painted concrete.

The furnishings throughout the home, all selected by Devlin or passed down through family, are a collection of antiques and new pieces that look aged, such as the giant armoire in the sunroom.

Devlin has brought the same attention to details outside the home, hiding air-conditioning units behind a cactus garden.

In 2001, the home appeared on the Eastwood Historical Home Tour as a "work in progress." Two years later it appeared on the tour in all of its restored glory, a new diamond in an old neighborhood.

Deborah Mann Lake is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to the Chronicle.