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## STRIKE A BALANCE

When it comes to future-proofing the renovation of an old house to ensure it won't feel outdated in years to come, Lacey Soslow's philosophy is to "honor what is there but make living comfortable." In her historical Philadelphia home, she kept the original floor plan and repaired salvageable elements to preserve period detailing. Modern appliances add contemporary convenience.

**Splurge & Save**  
Spend on things you touch (like faucets and handles) and save on things that won't get as much wear and tear (like pendant lights).



# Old house, NEW TRICKS

The most successful remodels juggle how to *embrace modern living* while keeping what makes a home unique—and staying within a budget. Renovation expert Lacey Soslow shares what she's learned about ushering a house into the present without erasing its past.

**Irreplaceable**  
Original columns and moldings are almost impossible to re-create. Repairing them maintains their of-another-era flair.

**Reimagine**  
Simple Shaker-style kitchen cabinet doors pay homage to the home's turn-of-the-century character even though they aren't original.

PHOTOGRAPHER: AGENT PAUL BAKER; STYLING: EDDIE ROSS

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The renovating bug crept up on Lacey Soslow gradually. It started with fixing up the first house she owned. Then six years ago, she found herself frustrated with the remodels she saw happening around her in her hometown of Philadelphia. “Developers were coming in and totally gutting old houses. They weren’t saving any of the original details,” she says. Lacey, who was the e-commerce director at garden and home retailer Terrain at the time, and her mother, Audrey, a real estate broker, decided to buy a small two-bedroom house to restore and sell. “We thought, ‘Hey, let’s try and do this differently.’” They sold their first flip successfully and moved on to another project and then another.

Before she knew it, Lacey had amassed a Rolodex full of contractors, plumbers, and electricians and had learned the nuances of HVAC systems. So when she and her wife, Michelle Landry, discovered a house for sale on one of their favorite blocks in Philadelphia, Lacey didn’t hesitate to make an offer. “If you looked at the before photos, it looked so intimidating,” she says of the house, whose age is uncertain (it’s listed as 1925, but Lacey suspects it

may date to the 1890s). “But from the projects I had done with my mom over the years, it was clear to me that much of the house was actually in great shape,” she says.

The single-family home had been chopped up into three mini apartments, each with its own kitchen, but the original plasterwork hadn’t been damaged in the conversion. Likewise, the floors and staircase were covered in thick 1970s carpeting, but the hardwood remained preserved beneath. The couple were also charmed by the front porch, rooms with

grand proportions, and windows on three sides—rare qualities in their South Philly neighborhood. Lacey set out to bring the old house into the 21st century while redesigning it in a way that would stand the test of time. She actually decided to make the house smaller by removing a kitchen that had been added to the back. This move gained much-desired space outdoors and tons of daylight indoors. Out front, Lacey replaced the brick portico with one that felt period-appropriate. Inside, preserving the plaster and the original floor plan dictated many of her design decisions. For example, the new kitchen layout was planned around decorative columns.

To keep the budget under control, Lacey made an inventory of what was in good enough shape to keep: The relatively new boiler did not need replacing, and sanding and sealing the existing oak floors brought them back to life.

Turns out, this wasn’t just another resale project; it was more personal. “I don’t know where we’ll be in 10 or 20 years, but the intention was that this was where we wanted to be for a long time,” Lacey says. That doesn’t mean she’s leaving the world of home improvement anytime soon. During this renovation, she was

thinking back on her many years of remodeling and how she intentionally sought female pros. She wondered aloud, “Could you create a way for all the women electricians, plumbers, and contractors to connect with each other and do-it-yourselfers like me?” Her answer: Matriarchy Build, a digital platform that links female and LGBTQ+ tradespeople with homeowners for telehealth-style renovation help. “There’s such a divide between skilled trades and DIY,” she says of the recent launch. “I’m hoping we can create a marriage between those two spaces.”

“It may sound silly, but not seeing a microwave instantly makes a kitchen more timeless,” says Lacey, who had outlets installed in the pantry for modern conveniences. The Hallman stove has the look she craved at a fraction of the price of imported French models.



## DON'T BE AFRAID TO SUBTRACT

It might seem unthinkable to give up square footage by removing an addition, but not every “improvement” is worth keeping. The ground floor of Lacey’s house felt dark and gloomy because an addition off this back wall blocked the sun. To maximize daylight, she demolished the extra room and specified large glass doors for access to the backyard.

**Draw a Connection**  
Black trim on the new doors and windows echoes the finishes on the kitchen faucet, pendants, and hardware.



**Refinish**  
In addition to saving money, refinishing the existing floors preserved their inlaid borders.



### Finishing Touches

Lacey balanced the home's historical bones with furnishings and accessories from modern eras.

### Unconventional Choice

Even though she converted the house to forced-air heat, Lacey left the original cast-iron radiators because she liked the authentic look they lend.



### Serene Oasis

Lacey worked with friends and former colleagues at Terrain to source plants for the indoor and outdoor spaces—the larger and more sculptural the better, like this ficus triangularis and Australian tree fern.



### EMBRACE THE QUIRKS

The original fireplace in the living room, *opposite*, was apparently sealed by previous owners, but its elaborately painted faux-marble mantel and surround are a distinctive feature Lacey decided to keep as a focal point. It was cracked, however, so “the builder reset it to get it as straight as possible,” she says. Lacey had the plaster on the walls restored in a subtle blush hue.



### UPDATE SENSITIVELY

It makes sense to more fully modernize bathrooms, but that doesn't mean you have to throw out the original aesthetics with the bathwater. Lacey chose the new white oak vanity, marble countertop, and tub, *above*, for their chameleon-like ability to blend old and new. “The vanity felt like it could fit into something more modern but also have a little old-school farmhouse energy,” she says. The new freestanding tub boasts a matte black finish in a slightly updated silhouette compared to a typical vintage model.



**Open-Door Policy**  
 For the garage-turned-party-room, Lacey retained the overhead door so she can close it in inclement weather.



**MAXIMIZE OUTDOOR SPACE**

Removing the addition off the back of the house not only made the interior brighter, but it also gave Lacey and Michelle (opposite, on right) 200 square feet of valuable outdoor living space. The exterior phase of their renovation also included transforming an old storage garage into an indoor/outdoor dining room, above.



**CREATE A COHESIVE LOOK**

To tie the whole outdoor area together, Lacey hardscaped the patio and former garage with slate pavers, opposite, making the spaces feel more like rooms. They painted the privacy fence and garage door black and coordinated the look by using black masonry paint on the interior of the dining area (the dark color also hides some of that space's imperfections).



**Living Sculptures**

There's no garden space in the backyard, but oversized planters with variegated maidengrass and a Peruvian apple cactus add greenery and height.

# reno notebook



"No matter how experienced you are, things are always going to take longer than you expect, and there will always be surprises," cautions Lacey, who has renovated multiple homes. She shares her advice for working on an older house.

## 1 EXPECT TO MAKE MAJOR UPDATES

"Always do a full-blown inspection before committing," Lacey says. With an older, unrenovated home, you should anticipate that you'll need to completely replace plumbing and electrical wiring, as she did.

**2 ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS** Lacey says the best way to find a good contractor is through word of mouth from friends. It's critical to see examples of their work and ask for references. Also consider a service like [angi.com](https://www.angi.com) to connect you with top-quality pros with verified reviews.

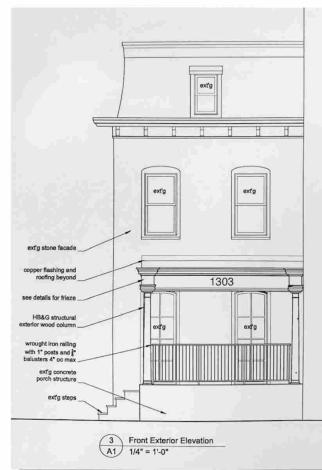
**3 GET THREE ESTIMATES** "Not just because you can compare costs, but you also get a lot of information through the process," says Lacey, who walks the house room by room with each contractor. "It's helpful to get different feedback."

**4 DO IT ALL NOW** Include as much as possible in your initial renovation. "It's in your best interest financially," she says. "There are so many economies of scale."

**5 EMBRACE THE LAYOUT** It can be a cost savings to keep walls and new plumbing in the same place as old, especially on upper floors.

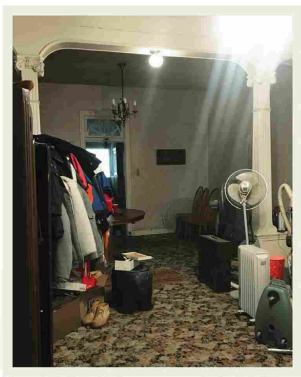
## DONATE YOUR LEFTOVERS

Consider donating old kitchen cabinets, appliances, and bath fixtures you aren't reusing. The Good Future Design Alliance ([thegfda.com](https://thegfda.com)) partners with companies such as Renovation Angel that will remove items in resellable condition. "The cost is comparable to your contractor ripping them out, but it's often a tax write-off," says GFDA founder Kate Story. Bonus: They don't wind up in a landfill.



## PORTICO REBUILD

Lacey and Michelle fell in love with the house for its front porch, a rarity in their Philadelphia neighborhood, but the original architecture had been replaced by brick at some point. The couple hired an architect to re-create a more period-appropriate structure, pulling inspiration from nearby homes. "I wanted it to feel more open and airy and to feel consistent," Lacey says. "The black columns [painted Sherwin-Williams Tricorn Black along with all trim] feel more aesthetically pleasing for the house."



## CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

After demolishing the addition at the back of the house, Lacey envisioned a wall of glass with a view to the patio. The new custom doors required some negotiating between her vision, the architect's opinion of what was possible, and a reality check from the builder on logistics and cost. "The architect was like 'you can go bigger' [because ceilings are so high], but bigger openings also mean more structural challenges, and that will add more expense," Lacey says. "So it was a learning journey."



## HIDDEN SYSTEMS

Replacing the electrical wiring and plumbing throughout most old homes, including Lacey's, is a must. This house lacked central air conditioning, but Lacey didn't want to have to conceal air ducts in every room. Instead, she decided on a split system with one condenser on the third floor and another in the basement to minimize the necessary ducting on the ground and second floors. It cost only a little more to add central heat along with the air conditioning, so she went for it knowing it would cost much more to wait and add it at a later date.



## PLASTER KNOW-HOW

Not only did Lacey save the original plaster moldings, but she also hired plaster artist Luren Jenison of XoXo ([hellaxoxo.com](https://hellaxoxo.com)) to apply subtle texture to the living room walls, which adds visual depth and looks original to the house. Although Lacey hired a pro, plaster can be a DIY project, especially if you aren't aiming for a smooth finish. You can find plaster in a range of colors at [vasariplaster.com](https://vasariplaster.com). Lime wash, a special paint that is premixed with limestone, is an easy-to-apply alternative that gives the wall a chalky effect. Find it at [portolapaints.com](https://portolapaints.com). ■

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING: JACKIE GUBIC, AIA, OF INHABIT