



**Wilkinson Home Transformation**

# Transformation

Nestled among majestic oaks and rare perennials was an ineffective 1970's solar energy house completely disconnected from its best feature— its site. Our clients, the Wilkinsons, loved their property set deep in the woods yet close to town, and they had a deep respect for the house's solar personality. However, the house and the site had to be joined, both for views looking out as well as how the floor plan flowed and responded to the steeply sloped lot.

Our challenge was reconfiguring a restrictive structural system and poorly laid out spaces within an extremely tight budget for the amount of area to be affected. After exploring many easier design options that were over their budget, we arrived at a solution that added 280 sf of new space and remodeled 1,510 sf of space, and transformed their home on all four levels.

The Wilkinsons brought us a list of needs that we distilled into two key concepts: interaction with nature and interaction between spaces. The old layout had an open floor plan, natural wood materials, and a passive solar design including a 2-story greenhouse. Although theoretically this matched their needs the house felt disjointed. The solar aspect failed due to the wooded steeply slope site and the Michigan cloudy skies. The greenhouse was far too hot in the summer and freezing in the winter. The 12" thick masonry 'Trombe' wall sealed off the greenhouse but also sealed off most views to their treasured lot.



After:

*The screened porch reaches out into the trees and with views beyond.*

Their transformed home now gently reaches out to embrace their wooded surroundings from gently sloping rooflines to the cantilevered screened porch, their most heart-felt space. Whether it is for morning coffee, afternoon reading, or summertime sleeping, the family is now able to 'be' outdoors on their spacious porch which is visually connected to the entire upper level.



Before

*The old greenhouse with failed glazing and no views to the site.*

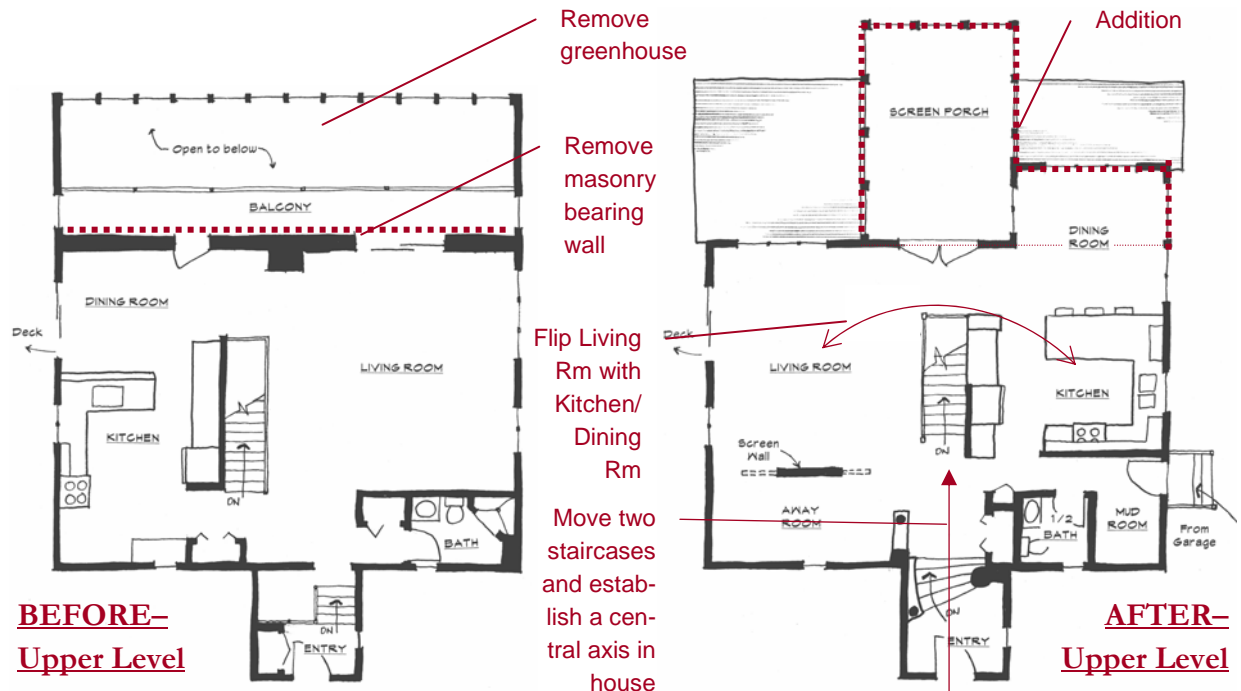
# Project Design- Upper Level

The house was built in descending levels going down a hillside. Upon entering the old house, you were greeted in what the Wilkinsons called the 'mouse hole' a small enclosed entry space with a steep stair going down into a door opening— dark and drab. From there you entered the upper level, and though it had an open-floor plan, it did not have a good flow or good views. In addition, access from the detached garage on the side was always through the *mouse hole*. The main stair took you down to the lower level which had the bedrooms, and then a few more steps down and through a thick door was the greenhouse. This all seemed to be the result of a builder forcing a stock solar designed house on an ill-suited site.

To create a more flowing movement pattern and better family spaces we flip flopped the upper level floor plan, as shown on the drawings to the right. The dining and kitchen were moved to the opposite side where we also added a new side door entrance, mudroom, and half bath. This improved access from the garage. The living room moved back to the other side, and then with its increased space we created the *away room* requested by the Owners— a space somewhat removed, less open, but not completely sealed off. By designing a small wall with retractable screens, the space within the space was created while providing a strong visual anchor in the middle of the open floor plan.

Views to the woods and an enlarged floor plan were achieved by the removal of the masonry load bearing wall on the upper level. Though this heavy demolition and restructuring of the trussed roof was expensive, all the spaces drastically changes in visual space and light as a result. Restructuring also allowed us to build an addition over what was the greenhouse. This addition enlarged the dining room and created a primary goal of the Wilkinsons— a spacious screened porch. The porch gets the best view in the house and is the extension of the long central axis we created.

This axis was created by moving and enlarging the entry stairs as well as moving the main stairs to the lower level. Moving stairs can be an expensive operation, but by doing so the new living room had proper space, the *mouse hole* turned into a welcoming entry, and long views were created in the house, allowing the house to live and feel much larger than the space actually is.



## *Building the Addition*



We removed the 2 story greenhouse first. After restructuring the main roof, we removed the solid brick bearing wall on the upper level, while letting most of it remain on the lower level. This allowed the building of the family room on the lower level over the existing foundations, but now as a fully finished and heated space. We extended the new dining room partially over that lower level structure and cantilevered the new screened porch over and beyond it. Pushing the screened porch beyond the main walls allowed for a more varied and attractive rear elevation and created a 3 sided porch with wonderful cross ventilation and stunning views.

A secondary entrance was built on the sloping side where the timbered stairs were to serve as a direct path from the detached garage to the new mudroom, kitchen, and half bath. A new well proportioned roofline over that entry and kitchen window provided relief from the drab side elevation and enlivened the personality of the home while keeping the budget restrained.

Our master plan calls for in the future adding a large outdoor deck off that side entrance, furthering the connection to the side yard.

## Interior Treats



The kitchen area is now off the new mudroom and remodeled half bath for easy access and function. The colors and textures provide a treat for the viewer: a deep eggplant purple covers the pantry and refrigerator area, creating both a monolith and separator in the open floor plan. Other attractive and cost effective materials in the kitchen include Maple cabinetry, Cork flooring, porcelain tile backsplash, white appliances, and a purple flecked laminate countertop.

The living room now enjoys more space and an elegant forged steel railing that mimics the trees beyond. It also has great visual connection to the screened porch and to the lower levels.

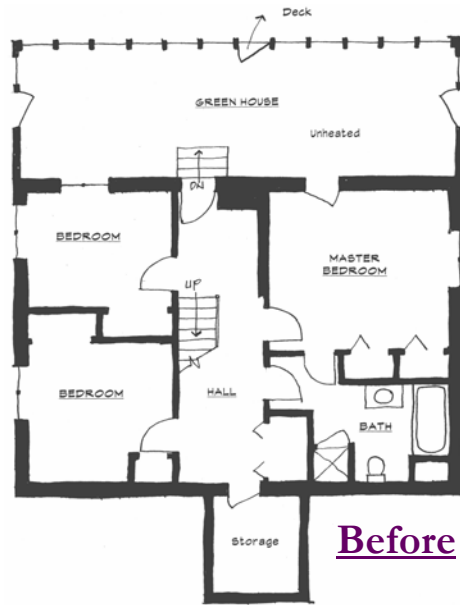
The views out from the kitchen and through the dining room are in sharp contrast to the old space which had simply a view of a brick wall. The dining room shows the large expanses of windows and rich yellow walls, typical for the upper level.



*Before: The old view in the kitchen and dining*



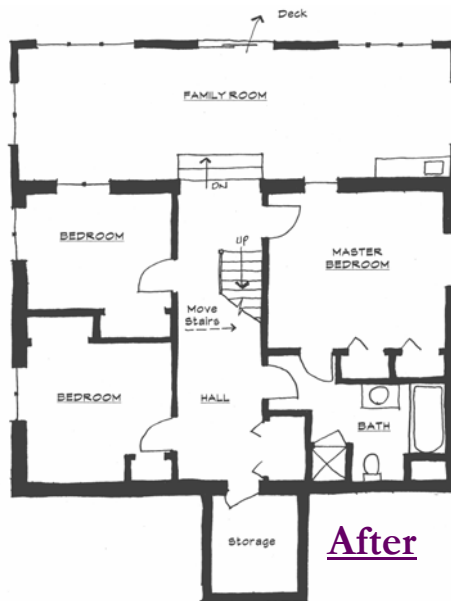
## Project Design- Lower Level



The impact on the Lower Level was that of greater usability. A Family Room was created where the greenhouse once stood, this time with central heating and air conditioning. In addition we installed in-floor heating for added comfort for young children playing on the brightly colored floor tiles.

Though we added no space on the lower level we increased its usage dramatically. This was done by shifting the staircase down to the lower level and by opening up the wall down to the new family room. This created a direct visual and audible connection to the upper level— key for a children’s play space.

Before: the old greenhouse



After: view to the family room from the upper level



During construction: the in-floor heating being laid in the new family room.

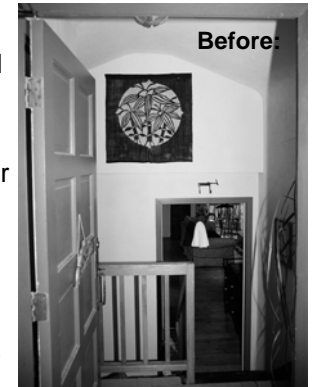
## Long Sightlines



The house still has an unassuming feel from the street, and it belies the size and beauty of the house that is behind the small front entry.

As you enter the house you are greeted with long sightlines that extend through the house and into the trees beyond. You are able to see four different levels in the home and the stairs connecting each of them. Though none of the spaces are overwhelmingly large, the visual connection adds an expansive view without adding a lot of square footage. The spaces in between

are full of details: peeled Cedar logs used as columns, a curved entry stair, glimpses of the cranberry red divider wall and the deep purple kitchen cabinetry, the guard rail, the screened porch jutting out in the trees, and the outdoor deck off of the lower level family room.



*The old 'Mouse Hole' entry.*

And the sightlines up the central stairs the also work in reverse, allowing the Wilkinsons to look up and see people in the front entry from the lower levels of the house, something that could not be done previously.



## *Details Throughout*



A retractable screen wall painted in bold fuchsia provides separation between the living room and the away room while providing a dynamic focal point for the spaces. The side panels, covered in silk fabric, are retracted to adapt to large gatherings, or extended to create an away room, a space within a space.



Above is the half bath, another jewel-like retreat with wrought iron details, colorful accents, and clean lines.



The mudroom is at the new side entrance and is filled with all the function that this heavily needed and used space dictates. It seems that homeowners need a near endless supply of cubbies, shelves, and accessories to help them keep organized.

## *A Warm Home of Surprises*



The transformation of this home has wowed the Wilkinsons and their friends alike. Selective and creative detailing provides visual surprises around each corner, transforming the whole house while keeping costs in control. The rich details allow the house to unfold slowly like a great story. The previous home is gone, providing the bones and the basic character for this new interpretation. Gone also are the heating issues, the poor lighting, the leaky windows, the deficient kitchen, and the infamous brick wall. We call this a transformation because it truly transformed how the Wilkinsons see their home and how they live.

