

Small Addition,

A new entryway dramatically helps the function and appearance of a small Cape

by Lynn Hopkins

When most people start thinking about additions to their houses, they think big, and rightfully so. Additions are the most direct route to an extra bedroom or a bigger kitchen. Sometimes, a few small changes can have an equally large impact on a house. In our case, adding only 50 sq. ft. radically changed the little Cape my husband and I bought a few years ago (top photo).

We loved the tree-lined, kid-filled neighborhood made up of small "starter" Capes built just after World War II. But our house's front entry was a problem. There was just a door in the wall (bottom photo), nothing that acknowledged the importance of the front door as a symbol of hospitality. The lack of an overhang or roof meant that we got wet as we fumbled for our keys in rainy weather. Plus, the entry landing was so shallow that we had to back down the steps when we opened the front door. Once through the door, visitors and family alike walked directly into the center of the living room, where there was no place to hang coats or leave muddy boots, backpacks, briefcases or any other bundles. Because of the constant traffic, the living room was not used much and became more like a hallway with a fireplace. My goal was to

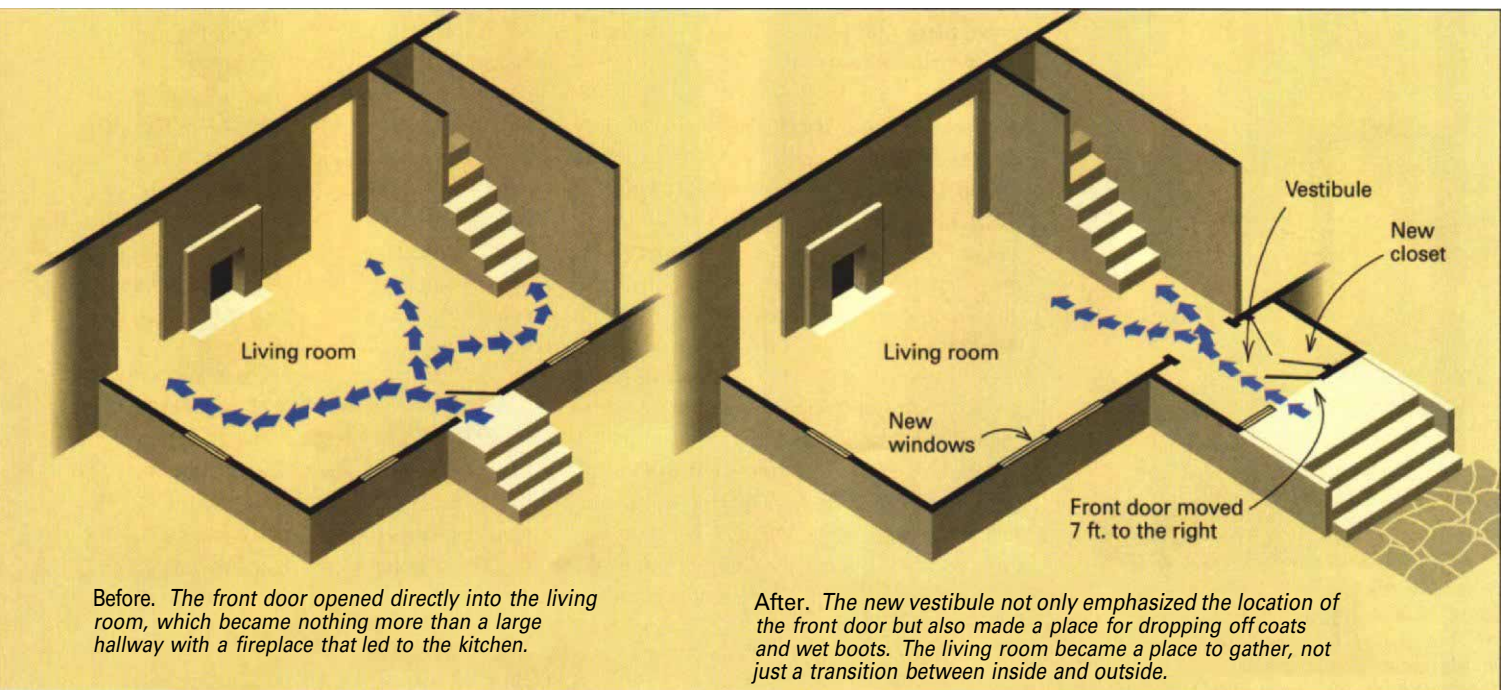
Big Improvement



A small, unsheltered entry doesn't extend a warm welcome. Half hidden by shrubbery, the Cape's old front door had narrow stairs and was difficult to use. A new covered vestibule and stairs (above) create an inviting, more hospitable entry.



CHANGING THE FRONT DOOR'S LOCATION MADE THE LIVING ROOM
A REST AREA INSTEAD OF A TRAFFIC CIRCLE



Before. The front door opened directly into the living room, which became nothing more than a large hallway with a fireplace that led to the kitchen.

After. The new vestibule not only emphasized the location of the front door but also made a place for dropping off coats and wet boots. The living room became a place to gather, not just a transition between inside and outside.



TWO NEW WINDOWS PROVIDE NATURAL LIGHT AND A BETTER PLACE FOR SITTING AND CHATTING



Small vestibule has all the necessary ingredients for a functional entry. A hall-tree bench, a weatherproof bluestone floor and ample closet space provide room for coats, hats, wet boots and umbrellas.

solve these problems without ruining the integrity of the house.

Relocating the front door was a key move—I knew that we needed more space for a closet, larger stairs outside and some sort of shelter over the doorway. As I was thinking about these ideas, it occurred to me that the entry location of our house, opening directly into the living room, was something of an anomaly. Most houses have a front entry that opens into a foyer that's centered on the main stairs with the public rooms opening off to either side. This arrangement separates these rooms from the hubbub of entrance traffic. My first change, then, was to move the front door approximately 7 ft. to the right, aligning it with the stairs and the passageway from the living room to the kitchen. Most of the foot traffic now circulates across the end of the living room instead of diagonally through it, making the living room a quieter place.

The new entry vestibule I designed measured just 5 ft. deep and 10 ft. wide (photo left). I put a window next to the door that not only lets in light but also lets us see who is at the door. I chose bluestone for the floor because it can tolerate wet and muddy things that will be brought into the house; I used the same stone on the porch landing and steps. I also made sure that there was space for a hall tree with a bench, coat hooks and mirror. (Luckily for me, my father is an avid and willing furnituremaker; he made quite a few of the pieces in the house in addition to the hall tree.) Finally, I made enough space for a closet for coats, hats and boots.

Relocating the front door made it possible for me to put in a pair of windows where the old door had been (photo above). This greatly improved the natural light in the living room. The sofa could now be located under the windows, directly across from the fireplace. This in turn made a much better conversational grouping of the rest of the furniture.

The size of the vestibule also fit the scale of the existing house and the rest of the neighborhood. On the gable end, I added a truss that would emphasize the span of the roof. To support the projecting roof, I designed curving brackets that were simple but substantial (photo top right); these brackets also introduce a design theme revisited inside the house.

Smaller elements are important parts of the overall design—Like most Capes, my house has double-hung windows with divided lites in a 6-over-6 configuration. These smaller panes give the house a lovely domestic scale that I could not ignore. Instead of one large window, I put a pair of double-hung windows in the living room, the same size and configuration as the existing windows. The window in the vestibule also has authentic divided lites and panes that are the same proportion as the double hungs.

The siding was also an important consideration. Much to our delight, our builder, Loren French, began the job by ripping off the aluminum siding, replacing it with white-cedar shingles at the appropriate time. White-cedar shingles are usually 16 in. long, 2 in. shorter than red-cedar shingles. Consequently, white cedar needs to be installed with a tighter exposure: 5½ in. compared with 7½ in. for red cedar. I find that this narrower exposure looks better on a small house. Because they are smaller and have not been squared and rebuted, white-cedar shingles are also significantly less expensive than red-cedar shingles and produce a shaggier, more rustic look, which is typical of many historic Capes.

Just because it was small doesn't mean it was cheap—I would love to say that this project was accomplished for peanuts and pass on miraculous money-saving techniques, but I would be lying. The renovation, which also included a new roof, cedar siding for the rest of the house and a snowballing list of minor improvements, threatened to equal the square-footage cost for building a nuclear-power plant. Without any additional changes to the house, the addition would still have cost just over \$370 per sq. ft. But the end result was well worth the expense and effort. These modest changes transformed our home, making the entire house more attractive, comfortable and convenient.

By careful evaluation, I was able to make changes that were modest and still most effective. Each little decision was treated as a design opportunity. Less can be more. □

Lynn Hopkins is an architect in Lexington, Massachusetts. Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted.

Bracket theme is echoed around the fireplace and windows

Once the sofa was centered on the fireplace, I felt compelled to redesign the mantel (bottom photo). The new mantel is made of cherry to match the rest of the furniture in the house, all built by my father. The brackets that support the mantel shelf are reminiscent of those used outside (photo right). The bracket theme is repeated again at an even smaller scale as supports for the deeper-than-usual window stools (center photo).—*L. H.*

