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Lisa Zebovitz and her daughter, Lily, enjoy the open spaces that fill their Oak Park bungalow, where only a sprinkling of columns and half walls interrupt the movement between spaces.

## Breaking the mold

Rehabbers take the 'basic' out of bungalows by opening spaces and shedding new light

Text by Karen E. Klages  
Photos by Bill Hogan

Ask Lisa Zebovitz of Oak Park to describe her home and she simply says, "It's a big surprise." She's right. From the outside, hers is a typical Chicago-style brick bungalow, dating to 1927. Once inside, though, the term "basic bungalow" just doesn't apply.

Three days after she closed on the house, work crews moved in to start a massive renovation project.

Conceived by Chicago architect David Seglin, the plan called for a contemporary use of all the space.

Walls separating rooms on the first floor came tumbling down. The long and narrow, railroad-car feel that is typical of bungalows disappeared.

The roof was raised to make a complete second story out of what used to be a sloped attic. The basement was finished into a combination rumpus room/guest room.

Nine months later, the home had "grown" not by expansion, but by "vision" -- from 1,600 square feet of livable space all on one floor to 3,400 square feet on three levels.

Zebovitz and Seglin are not the only ones who are seeing beyond the "basic" in bungalow.

Across the Chicago area and the country, a growing number of homeowners (and architects) are rescuing the ubiquitous bungalow from functional obsolescence...



Lisa and Steve Zebovitz's Oak Park bungalow

"This is potentially the largest segment of the old-house restoration movement," says George Murray, editor of *American Bungalow*, a quarterly magazine that got started in 1990 and has become both bible and grapevine to some 6,500 bungalow-lovers who faithfully subscribe... "Today," he continues, "people can go back to the bungalow and find it really affordable, or comparatively affordable, and so well-made. It offers a link to the past. It's a feeling of coming home."

In the Chicago area, there are a lot of bungalows to come home to.

The city and first ring of suburbs are full of "bungalow belts," says Scott La France, curator of the Charles F. Murphy Architectural Studies Center at the Chicago Historical Society.

These were the neighborhoods being developed during the late 1910s and '20s, when the entire country was swept up in the bungalow boom, which delivered an affordable, functional, single-family home to the emerging middle class.

Typical of all bungalow styles: 1 1/2 floors (raw, but potentially convertible attic or dormer space counts for the extra half floor); a long, sloped roof; a deep porch; and irregular-sized rooms.

In spite of their rock-solidness and all the wonderful wood and artful windows that can't be found in new homes, vintage bungalows aren't necessarily timeless.

"They're archaic," says Seglin of HSP architects of Chicago. "They're not designed for the lifestyles of today. They have one bathroom, all the living and sleeping areas are on one floor -- the main floor. And the bedrooms are small."

Thus, his fix for the Oak Park bungalow. He moved the three bedrooms off the main floor and up to the newly heightened second floor.

He elevated the bathroom count to 3 1/2. And on the main floor, he created a free flow of living spaces that move from a formal area for entertaining in the front to the inner sanctum of family life as you proceed to the back. There, you'll find a circle of kitchen, family room, and breakfast area.

Only a sprinkling of columns and half walls interrupt the movement between spaces. Natural light falls in shafts from deep light wells carved into the new roof.

"There are no halls on this floor," says Zebovitz, and environmental attorney. "I like the circular motion."

So does her daughter, Lily. At 5 years old, she maneuvers through the spaces without obstacles and finds the original hardwood floors a fine rink for "sock skating." Mom notes the plus side of all the openness: It keeps Lily in eyeshot of her and her husband, Steve Zebovitz.



The master bedroom features skylights