

STAYING POWER

Interior designer Robin Selberg reinvents her Germantown home to keep pace with her family's needs.





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Photography by Ross Group Creative

Robin and David Selberg have lived at the same Germantown address for almost 20 years, but the space they call home now is quite different from the one they moved into back in 2001. Over the course of three renovations the couple has transformed the house into the perfect home base for them and their three young adult children.

The house flows so perfectly, though, that you'd never guess it has had three facelifts; and that's the real beauty of it. Michael Murphy, Jr., of Mike Murphy Builders, who was at the helm of the latest project, says that's a feat not easily accomplished. "Part of the challenge is when you walk in, not to be able to tell what happened when. Anybody can knock down a wall or add an island, but to have it not be obvious that it was three separate remodels is a different story."

The Selbergs' love affair with the house started shortly after they attended an open house there. The two older children had just started school at St. George's and a few friends had moved into the neighborhood, but Robin and David weren't necessarily looking for a new home. That status changed quickly when they toured the house and were wowed by the acre-sized lot on which it sits. They bought the place and right away replaced carpet with hardwood floors, installed new front doors and made a few other changes.

Four years later, their family had grown to include three children and it was time to remodel to accommodate their new set of needs. This second project included a sunroom, a new laundry room, a master suite and a friends' entry.

By 2018, Robin was ready to embark on yet another renovation, this time focusing on the kitchen. "It still had the original cabinets and tile floors from when it was built in 1978," she recalls, "and we just knew it could be better."

Robin had big dreams, but wasn't sure they were achievable until Murphy came into the picture. She wanted to open up the kitchen area and convert a small, seldom-used dining room into a pantry, but she didn't know if a redo on that scale was possible. "Once Michael drew it all out, I saw it and I knew we had to do it. That was a big turning point for us," Robin says.

After a structural engineer confirmed that a large wooden beam entirely in the attic space would support the new open floor plan, it was full speed ahead. "The house has eight-foot ceilings so you don't want beams sticking down," explains Murphy. "We knew we weren't changing the ceiling height, so the challenge was how to make it as big and open as possible without anything showing."

Soon the beam went up, the walls came down, the space originally meant to be a formal living room became a larger, more useful dining room, and a deluxe walk-in pantry took the place of the old dining room.

As a professional designer, Robin had definite ideas about what she wanted.



“We knew we wanted to have an island in the kitchen and once we found out we could open it up I kept asking Michael how big he thought we could go with it. Once Michael laid it out and I saw how it maximized our space I knew it was perfect,” she says.



BEFORE



She also knew she wanted it to have an open and airy feel, and what it would take to create that feel in a space with relatively low ceilings. “There couldn’t be a lot of upper cabinets. We went back and forth with Burton Crawford of Crawford’s Fine Cabinetry. Even though you see a lot of kitchens without wall cabinets in magazines, you don’t see that done around here very much. My husband even doubted, but I was adamant.”

The kitchen plan included floating shelves in place of cabinets on one wall, but even those were vetoed at the last minute. “We had them made and the workmen were about to drill the holes to install them when I said, ‘No, don’t put them up.’ I’m so glad I stopped them because I really like the clean look,” says Robin.

Her list of kitchen must-haves also included wide shiplap walls. David, however, was in favor of tile for the backsplash behind the range, for ease of cleaning. Robin searched and searched for the perfect tile, but never found one she loved. A photo of shiplap in a chevron pattern did catch her eye, though, and now the unique treatment makes a striking statement.

Decked out in blue with fancy black marble countertops, the cabinets make the biggest visual

impact in the kitchen. Robin admits that she is bucking current trends, but she’s confident in her choices. “My style is eclectic; I like what I like. The trend right now isn’t a lot of color, but I’ve always liked color. I had red cabinets before.”

Since her new cabinets were custom made, the color options were limitless. “I had about three different colors that I was going between for the cabinets; one was a little more green and one was more blue. I ended up going to Memphis Paints to look at the Farrow & Ball paints. I walked in and they had a new display, and there was Hague Blue. I knew it as soon as I saw it!”

On the one wall that has upper cabinets, the cabinets, the trim, the walls and the ceilings are all painted the same crisp white. The continuity of color is a trick of the design trade that makes the room feel larger.

While she likes her vibrant kitchen, it may be the new pantry that Robin loves the most. It features plenty of storage, along with counter space and electrical outlets—the perfect spot to keep the coffee maker, blender and other small appliances handy yet out of plain view. “I tell all my clients who are remodeling a pantry to be sure they have power available and a countertop in it. Without a countertop it’s not as user friendly.”



The most recent renovation didn't stop with the kitchen. A downstairs bathroom received a dramatic redo from top to bottom. The original tub area is now a spa-like oversized shower with black and white marble subway tile. Black hex tiles on the floor give the room timeless appeal. A custom vanity designed by Robin and topped with the same dark marble used in the kitchen completes the look. While the final product is a stunner, Murphy admits he wasn't certain about Robin's countertop choice at first. Undeterred, Robin knew it would be perfect; she loved the matte finish and thought the dark color would be the most practical option for the way her family lives.

The project also included a few tweaks of earlier remodels. As part of the 2005 renovation Robin had a built-in desk installed near the home's rear entrance, but she never used it as she thought she might. Now, in its place there is a handy bench with storage underneath and coat hooks above.



Murphy describes the powder room as “night and-day different” from the way it used to look, despite the fact that the floor plan for the space remained the same. The half bath is a knockout with bold floral wallpaper and a unique vanity. Says Robin, “It was a table that I had bought for \$50 on an online marketplace.” After a few modifications and a coat of paint in her favorite shade of green, the piece has a new purpose adding flair to the design.

The Selbergs have put their personal stamp on each part of the house over the years, truly making it their home, and they intend to stay put and enjoy it for the long haul. “Michael’s sister is a Realtor, and when we finished this project she said, ‘You know, I could sell this house in a minute.’ I’m not planning on going anywhere!” Robin laughs.

“Germantown is getting built out. There’s not a lot of spots for new houses to go up,” says Robin. “We

love living in Germantown; it’s convenient. We didn’t want to move from Germantown, but we needed our space to be different. I think that’s the way of the future in Germantown. I’m all for remodeling to get what you want.”

And Murphy is in full agreement. “You’ve adjusted the house with your family’s needs. You keep making the space you have so much more usable and efficient.”

After two decades and three major projects, it would seem that the Selbergs might be done with home remodeling. When asked if that’s the case, Robin says without hesitation that a new separate garage is next up on the agenda. Life changes, floor plans and designs change, but it’s a safe bet that the Selberg family’s address will remain the same for years to come.



“I love a new house, but there really is something about remodeling and how the house feels afterwards. There’s always something surprising.”

—Robin Selberg