



Choosing One's RELIGION

A former church is transformed into a family home where stained glass takes center stage in the kitchen and master bath

By Chelsie Butler



A young, adventurous family with three children were looking for a livable and fun home in which their children could grow up. A former church in Chicago's Little Italy neighborhood turned out to be their sweet spot when it was converted into a single-family home. Original details, such as stained-glass windows, exposed brickwork and ceiling tumbuckles, were included in the design of many of the rooms, including the kitchen and master bath.

Linc Thelen Design and Scrafano Architects – both based in Chicago – led the 8,000-sq.-ft. project, which included leveling the former floors, raising the ceiling from 18 to 25 feet and exposing the beams in the attic.

"We built a model so we could see how everything would intersect and what the ceiling would look like," said designer, Linc Thelen. "There were some things we were not sure of until demo, and we discovered things we could do later on, such as add a set of stairs going through the nursery and incorporate custom bookcases."

The wife loved the lack of the loft space and high ceilings, but she also wanted some elements of a traditional home. It was also necessary for the open space to incorporate smaller, functional spaces like the laundry room on the main floor and a playroom in the attic.

Cooking Kitchen

The wife wanted the house to be a mixture of modern, industrial and even some shabby chic, but Thelen toned down this combination in the kitchen and adjoining main room, which are sleek and modern. The massive stained-glass window anchors the space, and because upper cabinets would have competed with it, the design team had to make up for the lack of storage space.

Thelen designed all of the cabinetry, which includes white lacquered units adjacent to the kitchen to give the area a built-in look and not compete with the other elements on that side of the house. The hickory wood cabinets in the main kitchen space have single doors that open up as drawers.

"Going with real wood cabinets gave me the ability to stain them exactly the color I wanted, which took a while to nail down," he said. "All of the finishes in the home were hand selected with much consideration."

White quartz waterfall countertops blend nicely with the white oak flooring in a custom white-wash stain and the earthy, cool gray cabinets. A 48-in. refrigerator/freezer on the left side of the kitchen is balanced by a 48-in. pantry on the right. The large island houses the dishwasher, sink, beverage center and a large trash unit. The kitchen design called for larger-than-usual appliances and a 12-ft. island to appropriately fill the massive space; the back wall between the refrigerator and pantry is 16 feet long.

One challenge in the kitchen was that there was no upper space for venting above the industrial range. To overcome this, the team built a downdraft to function for the unit. They put an external blower on the outside of the kitchen, and the HVAC contractor custom built the ductwork. The grill/vent cover was also custom built.

Another challenge in the kitchen was providing ample lighting in the space. According to Thelen, the ceiling is pitched at a weird angle, and there are no flat surfaces to install fixtures there. He designed and built a fixture above the island that hangs from a platform attached to the wood beams above. The independent pendants feature industrial-style mercury bulbs.