

# What Lies Beneath



Our 1891 Victorian, located in Rogers Park, a historic neighborhood on the north side of Chicago, is clearly not a midcentury modern home. But our love for the midcentury aesthetic is evident nonetheless.

The house had been modified over its lifetime, including a late-1920s renovation that introduced many Arts and Crafts elements, so it was no longer architecturally 'pure.' Consequently, we felt some freedom to decorate it according to our passions and interests, rather than having to hew to a strict Victorian style.

In 2005 we bumped out the back of the house to accommodate a main floor kitchen expansion. My partner, Greg, suggested that I employ the newly expanded basement space to fulfill my longtime dream of having a 1950s summer kitchen and a laundry room. I quickly and gleefully agreed.

## getting his period

Being the collector and decorator of the household, I enjoy mining the Web for information on furnishings, appliances and decor authentic to the midcentury era. With some determination and luck, I then locate the large and small appliances, furnishings and vintage collectibles that fit the style.

We chose four intense colors popular in the 1950s—red, green, black and yellow—and repeated them throughout the basement kitchen. Since the countertops have such a large visual impact, we punched up the retro look with red laminate and metal edging. Stacked vintage spice tins and boxes sit on top of the deep backsplash, and displays of canned goods provide additional interest. We have plenty of kitchenware collectibles within arms' reach ready for daily use: Pyrex cookware, painted wood-handled cooking utensils and vibrantly colored styrene plastic accessories made by Lustr Ware.

I use home magazines from the late 1940s to early '50s to discover large and small appliances that we want to own. I then comb eBay, Craigslist and local estate sales to find near-perfect models that are in working order, very good condition and complete—as parts can be very difficult to locate. Each painted small appliance receives a specific cleaning and polishing treatment [see sidebar page 17], and for chrome appliances I use Nev-Dull, which degreases, cleans and shines in one step. The end product is an almost perfect midcentury gem, standing proudly on display and even occasionally put into service.

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