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Summit Ave.

# style

A grand St. Paul duplex houses  
three generations under one roof

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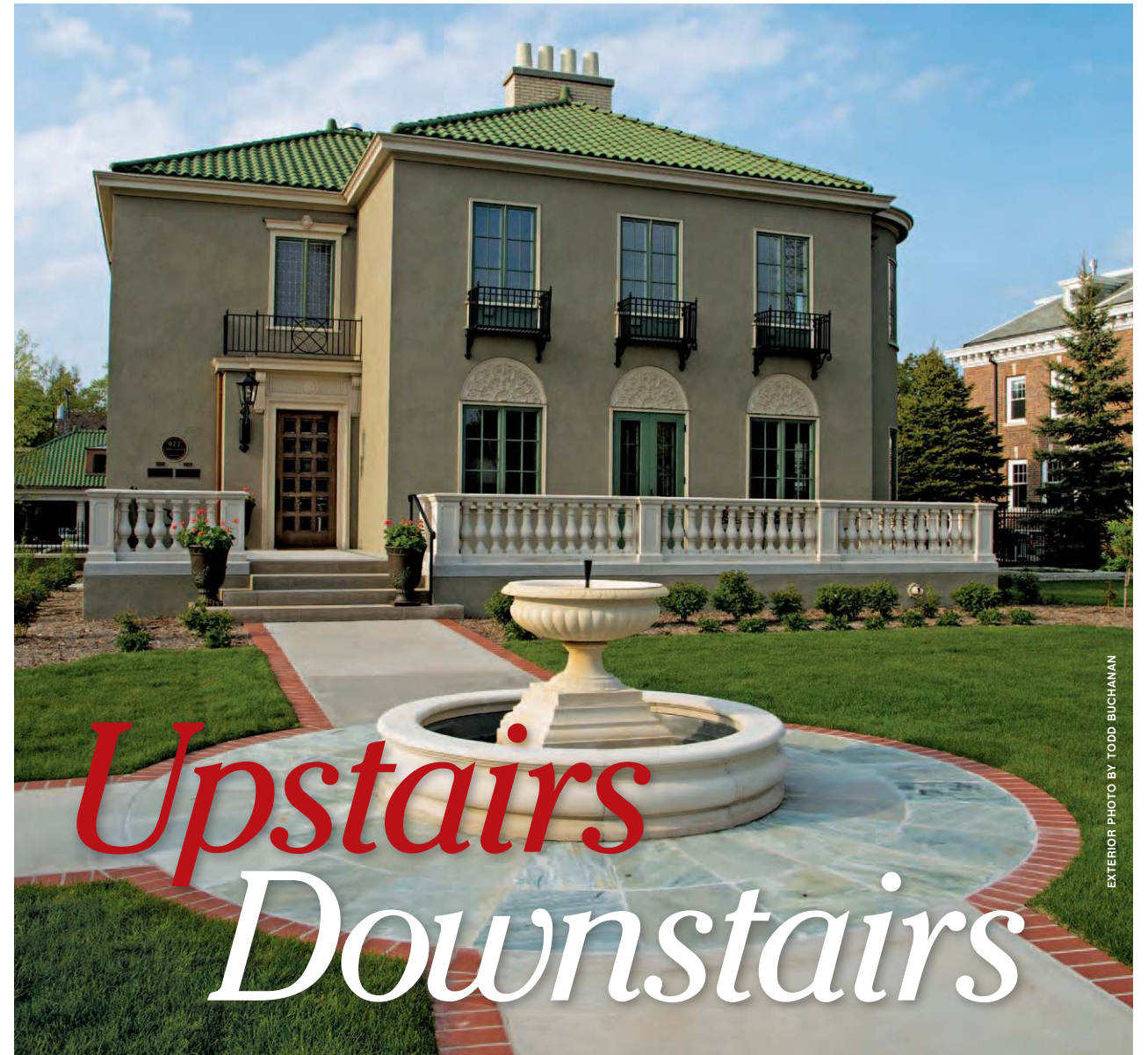
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The upper kitchen has a warm glow, thanks to the stainless appliances and island top, and the glass tile backsplash in a warm terra-cotta shade. The distinctive oval of the island is echoed by the oval overhead.



In the lower kitchen, the circular island and the perimeter countertops are topped with natural Iceberg quartzite. Finishing touches include custom cabinetry with period-glass doors and ornate ceiling stenciling.



# Upstairs Downstairs

EXTERIOR PHOTO BY TODD BUCHANAN

A grand Summit Avenue duplex houses three generations under one roof

by MEGAN KAPLAN ▲ PHOTOS by SUSAN GILMORE

Imagine St. Paul in 1924, the middle of the roaring twenties. There were no highways or skyscrapers on the horizon yet, and Summit Avenue—the stately four-and-a-half mile stretch between the Mississippi River and downtown—was an elm-lined thoroughfare populated by mansions, whose tony residents wore fedoras and flapper dresses, and drove around in Model Ts.

On a broad corner lot, across from what is now the Minnesota Governor's Residence, a state-of-the-art Mediterranean duplex with a tiled roof and a stone terrace was new to the block. A sym-

bol of healthy economic times, the novelty in its construction—a pair of tuck-under garages—meant that owning an automobile (and housing it) was a growing part of urban culture.

This particular feature, along with the rest of the duplex's exterior, was important to the Heritage Preservation Commission, which oversees the Summit Avenue protected historic district. "The HPC is concerned with telling the story of these homes to casual observers," says the designer and preservation expert David Heide, who was in put in charge of rebuilding and restoring the villa to its original glory.





**ABOVE** The Siggs' music room features a new gas fireplace and built-in shelving and desk. The deep gray walls make the space feel cozy and modern, but also make the period millwork pop.

**ABOVE RIGHT** The upstairs living room repeats the same historic architecture as the downstairs, but sleek contemporary furnishings give it a modern verve.



**ABOVE** David and Karen Olson share the Summit Avenue duplex with their daughter Amy, son-in-law David Sigg, and granddaughter Ava.

**LEFT** In the Siggs' contemporary condo, a stairway to the attic was removed to gain ceiling height and volume for the casual dining area. Natural light is abundant due to windows and French doors that open to the new terrace, as well as arched, period-glass windows over the stairway that open to a gallery lit by an art-glass skylight.



FAMILY PHOTO BY TODD BUCHANAN

David and Karen Olson had their own set of criteria when they first toured the home. They were looking to combine households with their daughter, Amy Olson, and her family—husband Daniel Sigg, their 12-year-old daughter, Ava, and two kids off at college—an unusual arrangement inspired by good friends of the family who had done the same thing successfully. Both families wanted to move into the city from homes in North Oaks and Falcon Heights, and to be within walking distance of a business district. And they hoped to find a property large enough to support a regulation-size tennis court—“you can’t be in our family if you don’t play,” says Karen, jokingly.

This duplex was ideal, in theory: It had two 3,000 square-foot floors and a prime location, within one block of the Grand Avenue shops and restaurants. “But it was just so ugly,” Karen says. “We thought we’d have to totally demolish it,” adds David.

The Olsons’ realtor, Mary Hardy, introduced them to Heide, who has extensive experience with the homes in Summit Hill. “She said, ‘Can you come over, wave your arms around, and tell them it’s going to be okay?’” Heide recalls. He walked the two families through a Minneapolis house that had been in worse condition before members of his firm, David Heide Design Studio, got their hands on it. “We thought, if David can turn *this* house around, we’ll put our trust and faith in him,” Amy says.

Early demolition work, which started in August 2009, revealed that the Summit villa was in poorer shape than they thought. Owned by the same family for about 50 years, the house suffered from deferred maintenance. Problems caused by leaking built-in roof gutters and deteriorating living room floor joists would

require major intervention. “Basically the only thing holding up the house was the stucco finish,” says Mark Nelson, the project architect.

But one advantage to having to replace most of the structure was that it was easier to incorporate the green elements the families desired. An impressive geothermal heating and cooling system, managed by a web-based control system, replaced the home’s older boiler and air conditioning units. It provides energy for domestic hot water and radiant floor heating, as well as warming the swimming pool and the garage, and operating a snow melting system below the sidewalks, terraces, and driveway. A 10,000-gallon cistern captures runoff from the yard, terraces, and tennis court to be used for irrigation. The home is presently awaiting LEED Gold certification.

Pulling the layers back, the Heide team found hints of the villa’s original features. “I love the forensics,” Nelson says. “It’s a treat to breathe new life into these buildings that might have been destined for the wrecking ball.” Piece by piece, they restored windows to their initial size and replaced the front iron rails with a cast stone balustrade such that the home’s façade would more closely match the 1924 design. Every detail on the exterior had to meet the HPC’s approval, from the green tiles on the roof (sourced from Ludowici, in the same style and color as the original tiles that were removed and reused on the poolhouse/garage) to the new four-car carriage house, which serves as a backdrop to the pool and tennis court.

Heide’s team was also tasked with remodeling the identical downstairs (for the Olsons) and upstairs (for the Siggs) to appeal to two very different sensibilities.

“The Olsons are more traditional, and the Siggs are very contemporary, and we had to find a way to marry the two,” says Heide, who completely scrambled the floor plans, with the exception of the living rooms and their original carved-wood-and-marble fireplaces. There were three small additions, including one that brought a new breakfast room to the first floor with a terrace above it for the Siggs, who didn’t want to feel removed from the outdoors.

A shared back entrance was reworked so that each family has its own private entry point, and the base-

ment was re-dug to lower the floor and, in effect, raise the ceiling in order to make the whole level feel more spacious. Trimmed in cypress wood and decked out with Moroccan style fixtures, it’s more a retreat than a man-cave. The original tuck-under garages were converted into guest suites, and Heide gave them glass terrace doors that open out onto a sunken patio. “We made sure that passersby would be able to discern that these were once garage openings,” Heide says. And the owners have enjoyed being able to open their home to the rest of their family and friends for overnight stays.





ABOVE The first floor family room is adjacent the new breakfast room addition.

ABOVE, RIGHT The Olsons' living room opens to a lovely, window-surrounded dining area. The fireplace mantel, marble surround and hearth, and the arched-top glass door were restored to their original splendor.

Mixing modern elements into the context of a historic environment—complete with molding, ornate tile, and art glass—was thrilling for Heide. He calls it “the highlight of a career.”

One of Heide's design triumphs is the walnut stair with a plate glass and stainless steel handrail that descends from the Siggs' dining area down to the back entrance of the house. Disengaged from the wall, it appears to float. “We had fun playing with what was new and what was old, and what part touched another,” says Heide. In both homes, Heide designed a visual layering of spaces, with curved archways and interior windows, so that there was an open flow without the need for the supersize kitchen-family room arrangements that have become the norm in new homes.

The Siggs' sleek, modern kitchen features granite countertops in a leather finish and an oval stainless steel island, where Amy and Daniel love to cook for family and friends and sample wines. On a recent night, after pouring glasses of Amarone, Amy waves everyone out onto the terrace to check out the potted herbs and greens she's started. Her mother admires the arugula: “Yours is doing better than mine!” Karen says. “I'll just steal some from her later.”

This appears to be one of the many benefits of the upstairs-downstairs living situation—the shared dinners, built-in babysitters, and the special bond that develops for a granddaughter living under the same roof as her grandparents. “My brothers don't get it,” says Amy, winking at her parents. “They're like, ‘We can't believe you want to live with *them*.’”

Not only is this a family that lives together, it is also a family that works together. Karen and David—who was

a family social science professor at the University of Minnesota for more than 25 years—started their business, Life Innovations, in 1980. The company's internationally recognized marriage counseling program, Prepare Enrich, has since served more than 3 million couples. Amy is a marriage and family therapist with Prepare Enrich, and Daniel, who originally hails from Basel, Switzerland, is a physician and entrepreneur who stays out of the family business, but cheerfully observes his in-laws' affectionate dynamics.

Being in the business of building healthy relationships has certainly given the family skills advantageous to making their combined living experience work so well. As does adhering to the motto that's stenciled in silver paint above the sink in the Olsons' kitchen: Swedish words that translate to “Eat well, laugh a lot, live long.” To celebrate the home's completion after two years of painstaking construction, the Olsons and Siggs threw a party last fall for all the workers who laid tile, demolished walls, and drew up blueprints.

“This is their home, too,” Amy says. “The tile setter, the painter... they all came over with their spouses and their kids to show off their amazing work. And we wanted to say, ‘thank you!’”

“There's a collective ownership around a house like this—the part you play becomes a piece of the history of St. Paul,” Heide adds.

“And you just can't help but wonder,” Amy says, “In fifty or sixty years, who will be living here?” **MH**

MEGAN KAPLAN IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN MINNEAPOLIS. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FEATURED PRODUCTS AND SUPPLIERS, SEE PAGE 146.



ABOVE The renovation included a new garage, pool, and tennis court.

LEFT One of the additions to the residence created this sunny breakfast room downstairs and a terrace off the kitchen upstairs.

FAR LEFT The Olsons combined two bedrooms and baths into a master suite with a large dressing room, but the circular dual vanity in the lavish master bath is the showstopper. The Rojo Alicante marble on the vanity also drapes the shower and bath walls, and continues into the adjacent dressing room. The floor of Ravenna basket-weave stone also gets a touch of warmth from a Rojo Alicante dot.

EXTERIOR PHOTO BY TODD BUCHANAN

