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Before & After: A Chicago Architect Straightens Out Her Victorian Cottage's Unwieldy Floor Plan

Removing a questionable staircase, Danielle Beaulieu brings light and fluidity into her 130-year-old home.

Text by
Melissa Dalton



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Architect Danielle Beaulieu and her husband, David Welch, found their 130-year-old Victorian worker's cottage in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood in 2017 after scouring the market and touring everything from turnkey flips, to new constructions, to total teardowns.

It had 10-foot-high ceilings on the ground floor, big original windows with blue stained glass at the top, and built-in wood shutters and pocket doors. There was "even a goofy little hobbit door under the staircase," says Danielle. "A lot of that kind of character is hard to come by."

Before: Exterior



Before: When the couple bought the home in 2017, the 1892 Victorian worker's cottage didn't have much in the way of curb appeal. "The quote-unquote landscaping was dirt and broken glass," says Danielle.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Exterior



A new wrought iron fence and landscaping create a more welcoming experience.

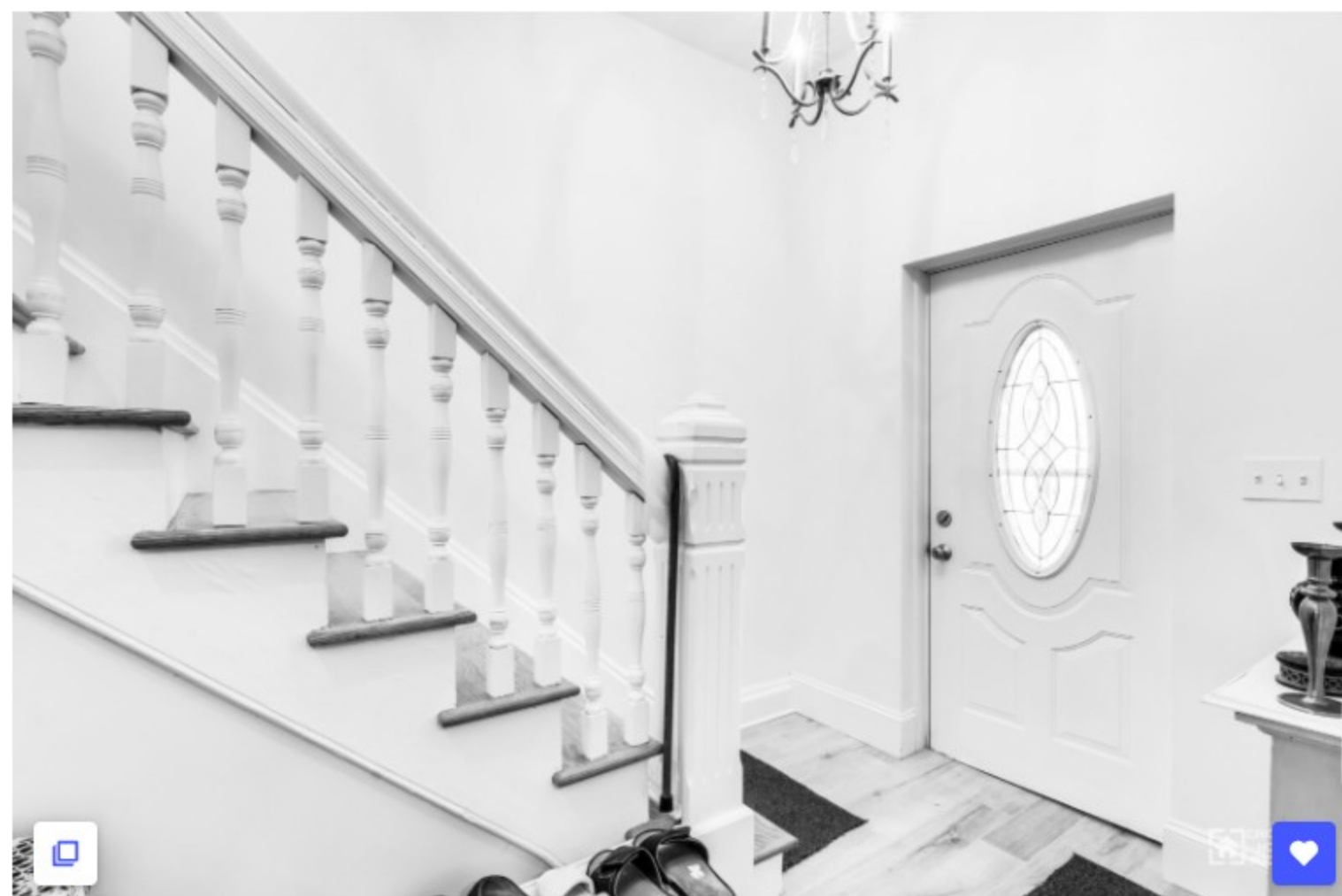
Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: exterior, house building type, shingles roof material, wood siding material, gable roofline

This type of housing is quite common in Chicago and the neighborhood, says Danielle, but because they're typically small, they're often subject to being torn down—or expanded beyond recognition. And while this one had also been altered, especially at the rear and on the second floor, there was enough originality there to spark the couple's interest.

They lived in it for two years before doing any demo, aside from replacing the collapsing fence in the front yard. "I was really interested in this dialogue between old and new," says Danielle. "How do you respect the past and bring it into today, yet modify it to suit your needs? So, we kept the big changes to the unoriginal portions of the house."

Before: Foyer



Before: The entry lacked definition.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Foyer



Danielle found a more period-appropriate front door at a local salvage and painted it Benjamin Moore's Space Black. The existing red oak floors were kept throughout the house, except at the entry, which is now laid with Ann Sacks Savoy Classics Hive Mosaic tile in Linen. The umbrella stand is by Umbra.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: hallway, medium hardwood floors, ceramic tile floors



The walls, ceiling, and trim throughout the house were all painted Benjamin Moore's Ice Mist to create a "neutral backdrop, with a really nice, fine-grain texture to it," says Danielle, which sets off the lines of more modern furniture pieces. The light is the Secto 4201 Birch Pendant Umbrella.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: staircase, wood railing, wood tread

At some point in time, previous owners had enclosed an exterior staircase at the rear of the property. There was already a main staircase at the front of the house, so not only did the secondary staircase take up too much of the footprint at the main level, it also fed into an upstairs bedroom. People then had to walk through that bedroom to get to a rear study.

"We called it the Clue staircase, like the board game, because it felt like a very sketchy back stair where something bad was going to happen, and it really wasn't necessary," says Danielle. "So, we saw an opportunity to remove it."

Before: Living Room



Before: The living room still held a lot of the house's architectural character, so it was kept much the same, aside from new furnishings and paint.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Living Room



The coffee table is a keepsake from Danielle's grandparents, made of monkeypod wood and bought in Hawaii in the 1960s. The couple flanked it with a Design Within Reach Raleigh Sofa and Eames Molded Plywood Lounge Chair. A Nelson Pear Lotus Floor Lamp and Rattan Ottoman from Franco Alibini finishes the room.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: living room, chair, ottomans, lamps, sofa, coffee tables, floor lighting, medium hardwood floors

Before: Dining Room



Before: The only change made to the dining room was a widened opening between it and the kitchen, placed where the hutch is in this photo.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Dining Room



Original pocket doors separate the living and dining rooms. In the latter, the Alle table by Hem is surrounded by Fiber Side Chairs from Muuto.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: doors, wood, interior, sliding door type



A view of the widened opening, which went from 30 inches to eight feet, between the kitchen and dining room. "The goal was to stand in the living room and look all the way through the dining room and kitchen, through the window to the backyard," says Danielle. "We really wanted to have this nice visual connection throughout the house." The architect found a woodworker to recreate the original casework where it was needed to patch with the old. The dining room light is the Konos Pendant from Tech Lighting.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: dining room, table, ceiling lighting, pendant lighting, medium hardwood floors, chair

Removing the so-called "Clue staircase" made it possible to enlarge the kitchen significantly at the lower level. Upstairs, Danielle carved out a proper hallway that fed from the stairs at the front of the house. She stacked two bedrooms on one side and two bathrooms on the other, one of which is a new addition.

With the floor plan reshuffled, the next consideration was bringing in more natural light to "track the day," says Danielle, and shape the daily rhythms of life inside the home. To that end, the openings between the kitchen and dining room, and the kitchen and breakfast room, were widened, and a window over the sink added.

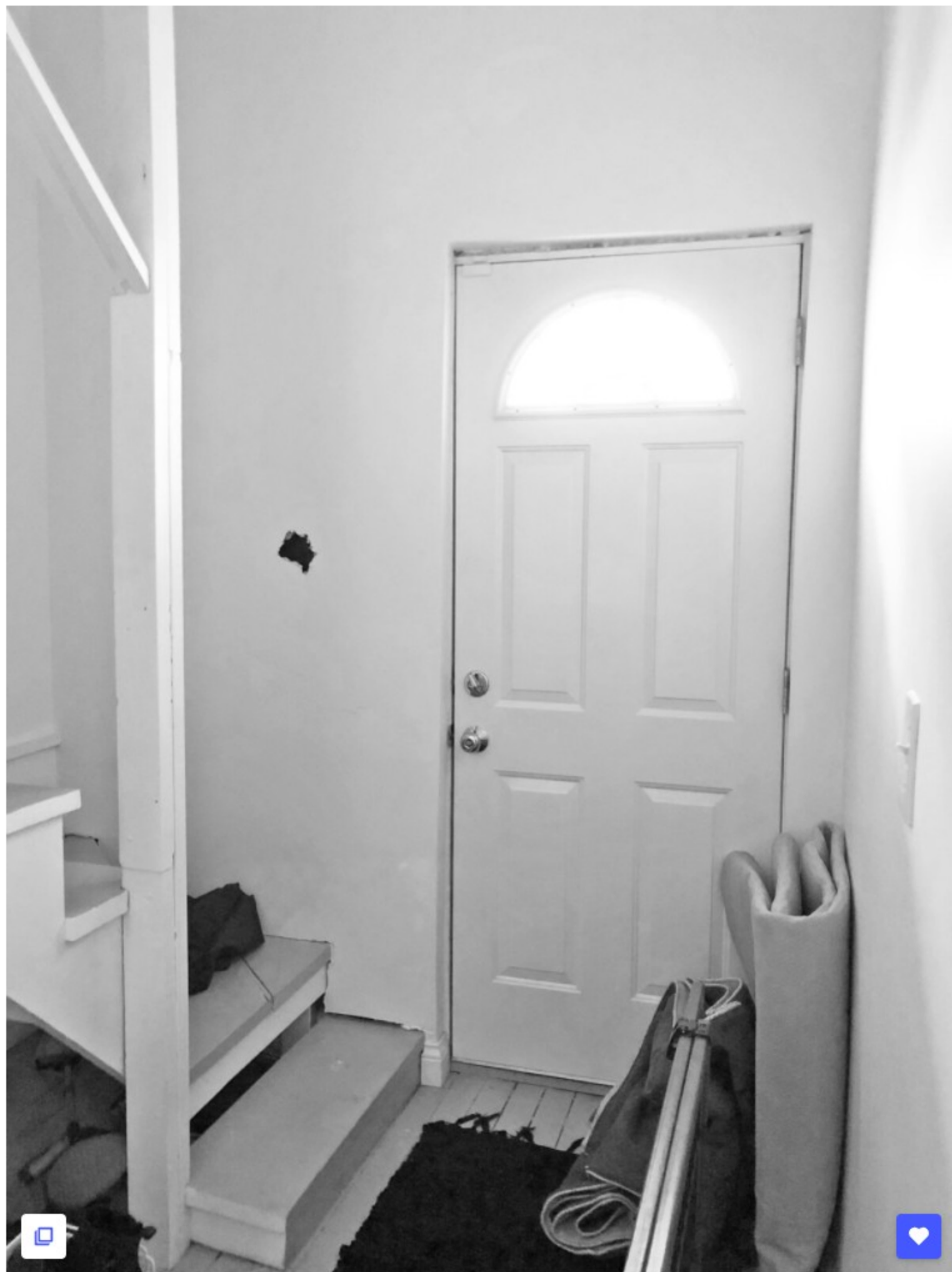
Upstairs, new skylights illuminate the bedrooms and study. Now, since the living room is east-facing, Danielle starts the day there with a cup of tea, while the west-facing kitchen is a wonderful place to make the evening meal and watch the sun go down. "It just creates different tones throughout the day," she says of watching the light change.

Before: Kitchen and Extra Staircase



Before: The extra staircase was on the other side of the kitchen wall, which cramped the room's layout.

Chicago Home Photos



Before: The "Clue staircase" was named after the classic board game for its unsavory look.

Courtesy of - lieu

After: Kitchen



The kitchen grew by about a third of its original size, and is covered in terrazzo floor tile from Concrete Collaborative. The cabinets are Ultracraft in Rift Cut White Oak, topped with Caesarstone Quartz in Fresh Concrete. The pendant lights are from Ferm Living and are the Brass Low Socket with Tall Opal Shade.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: kitchen, engineered quartz counters, ceiling lighting, wood cabinets, range, terrazzo floors, recessed lighting, dishwasher, pendant lighting, ceramic tile backsplashes, undermount sinks, refrigerator, range hood



The backsplash tile is by Fireclay, the 2x8 field tile in Calcite.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: kitchen, pendant lighting, range, ceramic tile backsplashes, terrazzo floors, wood cabinets, range hood, recessed lighting, undermount sinks, ceiling lighting, refrigerator, dishwasher, engineered quartz counters



This side of the kitchen serves as a beverage counter and hides all of the counter appliances. The artwork is by local Chicago artist Sally Ko.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: kitchen, ceiling lighting, refrigerator, dishwasher, pendant lighting, range hood, ceramic tile backsplashes, wood cabinets, engineered quartz counters, range, recessed lighting, terrazzo floors, undermount sinks



An existing hallway runs from the entry through a "reading room" to the kitchen. The curved door under the stairs was kept.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: storage room, shelves storage, type](#)

Danielle and her husband lived in the home throughout the seven months of construction, having breakfast by the water heater in the basement while the roof was tarped off. The architect worked on the remodel in her off hours while also at a full-time job at a local firm.

"It really became an exercise in instinct and believing my gut and going with it," she says. The project wrapped in February 2020, when Danielle decided to launch her own firm, - Lieu, shortly thereafter.

During the remodel, "I was still searching for my voice," she says. "But it showed me the value and impact that good design has on people's daily lives, and just how personal [a remodel] really is."

Before: Upstairs Bedroom



Before: People had to walk through this bedroom to get to the study beyond it, which was behind the glass door.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Hallway and Hall Bathroom



The upstairs hallway now has two bedrooms on one side and two bathrooms on the other, and ends at the glass door of the study.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: hallway, medium hardwood floors](#)



Danielle added another bathroom upstairs, with round penny tile from Cle Tile and a floating vanity from Ikea.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: bath room, ceramic tile floors, full showers, two piece toilets, wall lighting, enclosed showers, accent lighting](#)



The bathtub is surrounded by tiles from Daltile. The white oak plywood shelving is a repeating motif throughout. "I custom-designed these for each room, but they are all the same style and details—I wanted something that looked high-end, but didn't break the bank," says Danielle.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: bath room, ceramic tile walls, accent lighting, full showers, alcove tubs, ceramic tile floors, enclosed showers, wall lighting

Before: Main Bedroom



Before: The original bedroom layout did not allow for a king-sized bed, as each wall had either a door or windows.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Main Bedroom



Danielle reconfigured the closets so that the bed could be moved to the opposite wall. "One of my favorite things that came out of the renovation is waking up in this room: the beautiful light that comes through the curtains, seeing the shadows of the leaves, and hearing the birds," she says.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: bedroom, lamps, bed, nightstands, medium hardwood floors, dresser, table lighting



The new closet doors adhere to the main style of the house with white porcelain door knobs from House of Antique Hardware.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: storage room, closet storage type



Danielle made the closets a bit deeper, creating better storage.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

Photo Categories: storage room, closet storage type

Before: Main Bathroom



Before: The existing bathroom was enlarged and given a new layout.

Chicago Home Photos

After: Main Bathroom



The same white oak cabinetry from the kitchen was used for the double vanity, which is topped with a Corian counter.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: bath room, undermount sinks, accent lighting, ceramic tile walls, full showers, wall lighting, ceramic tile floors, enclosed showers](#)



Danielle added a few dormers to gain height upstairs, as seen in the shower here, although they're not visible from the street.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: bath room, wall lighting, full showers, ceramic tile floors, ceramic tile walls, enclosed showers, accent lighting, two piece toilets, undermount sinks](#)

After: Bedroom



The bedroom skylight is new. "We rarely turn on lights in the house all day long because of the natural light," says Danielle.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: bedroom, bed, table lighting, bookcase, shelves, medium hardwood floors](#)

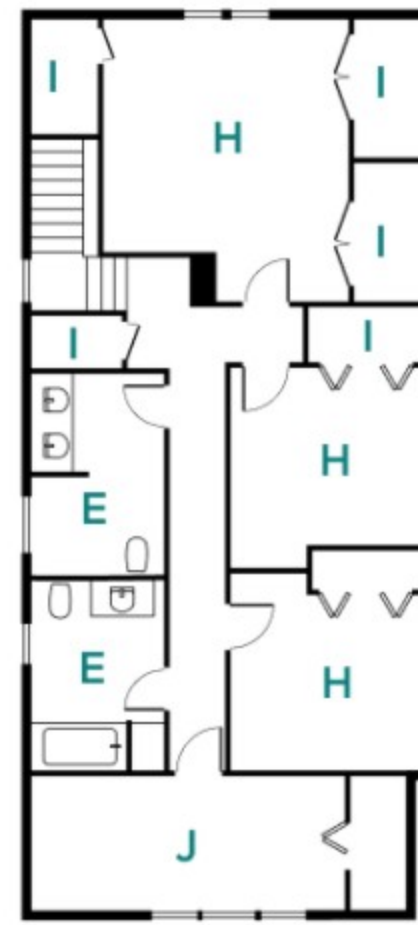
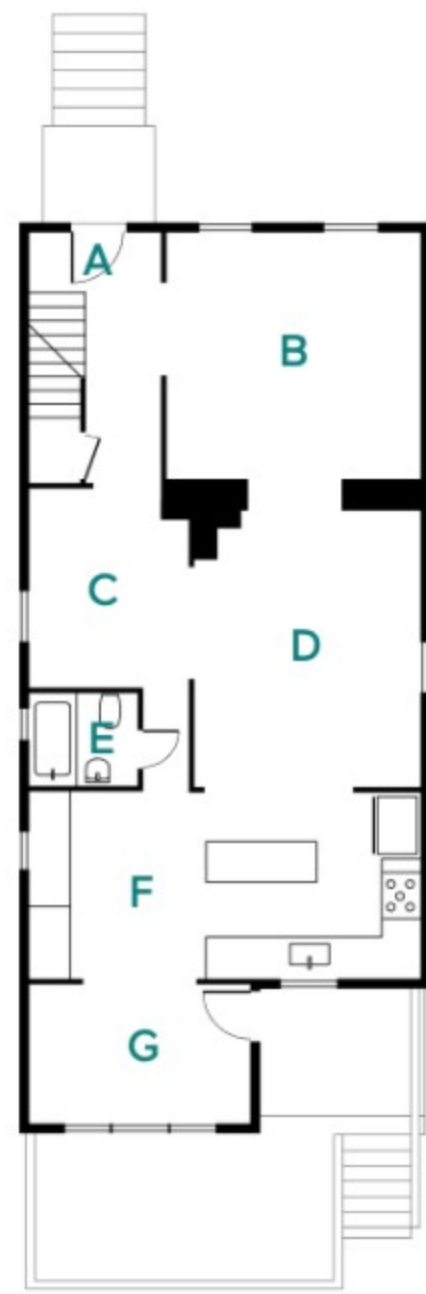
After: Study



The study is a dedicated office space with a Blu Dot Stash Desk, Muuto Fiber Side Chair, and a new skylight.

Photo: Aimée Mazzenga

[Photo Categories: office, study room type, medium hardwood floors, lamps, chair, desk](#)



- A Entry
- B Living Room
- C Library
- D Dining Room
- E Bathroom
- F Kitchen
- G Breakfast Room
- H Bedroom
- I Closet
- J Study



Sunlit House by - Lieu floor plan

Photo: Tim Lohnes

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Project Credits:

Architect: -Lieu / [@studio_lieu](#)

Builder: [Mfive Chicago](#)

Landscape Design: [Sprout Home Chicago](#)

Interior Design: -[lieu](#)

Other: [Wallin Gomez Architects](#)

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