

Architect
DLA ARCHITECTURE
1643 Beacon Street, Suite 22
Waban, MA 02468
617-969-8400
dlaboston.com

The firm's principal, Donald Lang AIA, is a registered architect with thirty years of experience. Prior to establishing his architectural practice, he founded Renovate, Inc., a design/builder of historically accurate homes updated for modern living.

He serves on several historic commissions in the City of Newton and was instrumental in helping to preserve the city's last working farm in use since the 1700s. It is now the site of a thriving community farm offering seasonal produce and educational opportunities.

Landscape Architect
ROGER WASHBURN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
8 Franklin Street
Somerville, MA 02145
617-776-6377
washburnla.com



ENERGY-EFFICIENT EFFORTS

When Donald Lang moved from 10 rooms to four, he was determined to cut back on utility bills as well as space. He had spent far too much money heating his previous residence, a large old home, so he made energy efficiency a priority in the renovation of his 1825 Greek Revival Cape-style cottage. First, he had recycled cellulose insulation blown into the walls and floor of the attic. To save on heating and cooling costs, Lang also replaced the windows. The new six-over-six double-hung windows on the street side of the house look like the originals, but they are made with low-e panels, the better to boost energy efficiency and reduce heat loss in the colder months. In the kitchen and guest room at the back of the house, he used French casement windows with insulated glazing that keeps the house warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer.

Speaking of hot and cold, Lang's new heating and central air-conditioning system includes a high efficiency sealed combustion gas boiler and a Super Stor indirect domestic water heater. The latter stores hot water in an insulated stainless-steel tank. So far this year, Lang's gas bill for heat, hot water, and cooking has averaged less than \$ 150 a month.

Using Consumer Reports as a guide, Lang selected only Energy-Star appliances. The Energy Star program is a joint effort of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy and is designed to help protect the environment while saving consumers money through energy-efficient products and practices.

All of this green technology can be more costly than conventional systems, but Lang notes that "over the long haul, I'll save money, so it was a no-brainer for me." — B.E.





PAST AND PRESENT The driveway at the back of the property put cars at eye level. Left: In the new landscape plan the parking area is depressed, putting it out of sight from the house or the cheery fenced yard.



*An architect downsizes
to a four-room house with everything
he needs and nothing more.*

Just the RIGHT SIZE

BY BELLA ENGLISH // PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER VANDERWARKER

WHERE OTHERS MIGHT HAVE LOOKED AT THE TINY HOUSE sandwiched onto a tiny lot not far from the rumbling traffic off Route 9 and fled, Donald Lang saw a historic home just the right size for a single guy, with little lawn upkeep and a handy location.

Then again, he's an architect and tends to see beyond the problems to the possibilities.

When it came time to sell the large home in West Newton that he had shared with his now-grown daughter, he thought small.

"I was so done with the big house," says the 59-year-old Lang. "It was me and the cat, and we lived in only three of the 10 rooms." So last year, he bought a four-room house built in 1825 in Newton Upper Falls. For Lang, the fact that it was in a historic district was a huge plus. While some people fear the restrictions that historic commissions might impose, Lang, who has served on such panels, says a review can actually help improve a plan.

The house is a Greek Revival Cape-style house, turned sideways to the street, giving the front a full southern exposure. "The light is wonderful," says Lang, "and when I saw this architectural form, I fell in love with it." Lang had already sold his old house, which meant he had only nine weeks to complete the project, and by necessity became both architect and general contractor.

Remarkably, he met his goal and moved in a year ago. He is thrilled with his little — there are only 633 square feet on each of the two floors — house with its state-of-the-art kitchen and bathrooms, smartly fitted in among the

period cornices, overhanging eaves, and original beams.

But a house this old doesn't come without problems, and this one had plenty. Ceilings were raised, insulation blown in, central air conditioning added. The entire yard was excavated so workers could build a concrete wall to reinforce the ancient fieldstone foundation.

Gloomy gray layers of siding were replaced with new cedar clapboards stained a golden mahogany that contrasts with the tidy black shutters that frame new thermal windows.

The kitchen looks out onto a small parking area at the rear of the house.

Because Lang didn't want to sit at the table with his cup of coffee staring at his car, he lowered the exterior grading and added fieldstone walls, a landscaped ledge, a small porch, and stone steps.

This gave him a sense of privacy, he says, and created a pleasing outdoor living space.

The kitchen was a 1950s nightmare before Lang worked his magic. By removing the old ceiling, he exposed the original beams and gained a foot of height. That allowed enough room to attach track lighting between the beams "to illuminate the ceiling at night and create this beautiful look." He reworked the kitchen



EXPOSED In the kitchen, Lang improved the layout, tore down a plaster ceiling to reveal boards and beams, and installed a pine floor with a stone inset. Right, from top: The front hall leads from the kitchen to the living room, where Lang has paired a contemporary sofa with a vintage settee.





floor plan and installed the latest in appliances, along with cherry countertops and a copper backsplash. He kept the old white solid-wood cabinets, but freshened them up with new doors and wrought-iron hardware. Where the original cooking fireplace had been, he installed a new slate floor over the old stone hearth.

The first-floor bathroom — the only one in the house when he bought it — also needed a makeover.

Lang turned it from a full bath to a half bath and used the remaining space to create a closet and pantry.

The small living room was cheerless and Spartan. Lang replaced the worn oak floors with wide-plank pine and painted the walls a warm taupe color. When his daughter, now 31 and living in Los Angeles, offered him her sectional sofa, he at first declined. How could it possibly fit in such a small room? She persisted, he relented, and the sectional looks

great right alongside a circa-1880 settee from his grandmother's house. "My Great-Aunt Sadie was a large woman. She sat on this and broke it," he says. "It was in the basement for 20 years." Now rebuilt and reupholstered, the settee suits this eclectic room, where Lang spends his time reading, relaxing, and enjoying the entertainment system he tucked away in a narrow closet.

As for the second floor, Lang opened up the staircase, landing, and hallway and created his own little art gallery. Off the hallway at the top of the stairs, he added a full bath by constructing a dormer. In the master bedroom, the old woodburning fireplace is now fitted with a gas insert.

The guest room doubles as a home office, and Lang has set up his computer on a table in front of the window, where he can see the Charles River across the street at the bottom of Hemlock Gorge, which is part of a conservation preserve.

The house finished, Lang waited a year to tackle the yard, and though he loves to garden, he called in landscape architect Roger Washburn of Somerville. There's a brick patio with table and chairs, a storage shed, and an herb garden and plenty of dwarf lilacs, hydrangeas, and arborvitae. The brick steps leading to the front door were replaced with slabs of granite, and old iron railings with white wooden balustrades complement the new picket fence.

Whether he is relaxing on his patio or leading a visitor through his refurbished house, Lang is clearly a man in love.

"This is like a New England village," he says. "It's a very mixed, diverse neighborhood. The house had the location. It had the history. And it was just the right size." He pauses: "You know, they don't make four-room houses anymore."



BED AND BATH To gain storage, Lang turned a full bathroom on the first floor into a half bath (left) where he covered the walls with old-fashioned stamped tin. He reworked the rest of the space into a closet and pantry. The fireplace in the master bedroom (below) was fitted with a gas insert. Facing page: In the guest room, which doubles as a home office, white woodwork stands out against the soothing blue of the walls.

