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PROJECT
Boxwood Manor
ARCHITECT
Lyle Bradley
LOCATION
Boston, Massachusetts

A young architect transforms a small row house into a deceptively roomy family home.

Lyle Bradley spent years of weekends and evenings resurrecting an East Boston structure using his carpentry skills, repurposed materials, and clever space-saving interventions. The revitalized 800-square-foot residence joins a rejuvenated backyard, where Bradley's wife, Kara Lashley, and their daughter, Lily, pose next to Bradley's new freestanding workshop.



Lyle Bradley was in the market for a project and a home, and East Boston was happy to provide both. It was 2005, and Bradley, fresh out of architecture school, found himself standing inside an old row house in a working-class neighborhood across the harbor from downtown Boston.

While Bradley was looking for something that would let him put his carpentry skills to use and bolster his portfolio, the two-story, 800-square-foot home before him had seen better days. Almost as soon as he arrived, he walked out.

That's when a neighbor chased him down: "You gonna buy this house? These houses are built good, good bones," he recalls the woman saying, along with a few unprintable words. It was a challenge Bradley decided he couldn't pass up: "You would never build a house that skinny, but there it is. So how do you work with it?"

If you're Bradley, you transform the entire home from top to bottom to give it an open, contemporary aesthetic that complements the historical character of the neighborhood. The dark, narrow walls so common to row houses have been knocked down to create a warm, airy expanse that maximizes every inch for Bradley, his wife, Kara Lashley, and their daughter, Lily.

It took seven years to renovate the building, in part because Bradley scratched out the work on nights and weekends away from his job at Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects in Boston. But the timeline also reflects momentous changes in Bradley's life—he became a husband and a father over the course of the project—that >



brought more of a family focus to the overall design of the home.

Bradley, who was a carpenter before studying architecture at Washington University in St. Louis, handled much of the physical work himself. When he says the project "turned into a real labor of love," he's talking about all the nights he and Lashley spent cooking off a camp stove in the bedroom because the kitchen was filled with power tools. "Let's just say if I hadn't moved in here, Lyle might still be tinkering away," Lashley jokes.

"There might still be a workbench in here."

Early on, Bradley decided the key to the renovation was shifting the staircase.

The stairs bisected the house, shrinking rooms on the first and second floors that already felt cramped. "You had to go up the stairs and through a bedroom to get to the bathroom, and it was just bizarre," he says.

Bradley moved the stairs against a party wall, and a new skylight above the staircase now bathes both floors in natural light. At the top of the Douglas fir steps, Bradley built a curving half wall meant to evoke East Boston's boat-building past.

The half wall opens into Lily's room, connecting to a built-in desk that wraps around the stairwell. "I like having a lot of light and just the openness of it," Lashley says. "That is my favorite room in the house."

Downstairs, the living room and kitchen flow together seamlessly, and views to the backyard give the space added depth. Wall to wall, the living area is about 15 feet wide, meaning any furniture would eat up

critical space. Bradley figured the best way to save room was with built-ins, including a custom couch that extends from the staircase. "When you're in that kind of narrow space, inches matter," Bradley says. "It was just looking at every single thing, like how big does a couch need to be?"

Custom maple shelving on the wall opposite the couch provides ample room for books, ranging from Frank Gehry to Dr. Seuss. For the home bar, Bradley designed a sliding birch-plywood screen. The design evokes the rippling waves of the nearby bay, adding a signature design feature that also conveniently >



In the living room, the stair's lower step reaches out to form an arm, while the ascending stairs create a natural incline for cushions (above left). An alcove in the stairwell displays a white ash sculpture by Bradley (above). The office, which is also Lily's room, features a Babyletto crib and a Smileywalls wall decal applied atop Normandy paint from Benjamin Moore.





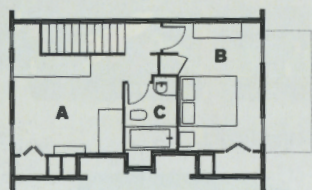
hides shelving and a radiator. Bradley says he found inspiration in Scandinavian wood-working and Japanese shoji screens.

Much of the wood and other materials were reused or salvaged from construction sites. Sashes from old double-hung windows were flipped on their sides to create casement windows for the front of the house. In the kitchen, Bradley refinished cabinets and butcher-block countertops his mother had planned to throw out.

Outside, the couple transformed the yard into a quiet urban retreat. They built five raised garden beds, where they now grow vegetables and seasonal flowers. The yard is also home to Bradley's workshop, which had been located in the kitchen during most of the construction. Bradley again used Douglas fir, this time to frame the shop, adding bamboo reeds for siding and Polygal sheets to filter in light. The couple built planted roofs over the shed and a small greenhouse space off the kitchen.

Bradley and Lashley say they learned a lot about design, and about themselves, over the course of the renovation. In trying to make every inch count, they found that the secret to maximizing what's important to their family is being minimal. "You can live in a smaller space than you think you can," Bradley says. □

Second Floor



Boxwood Manor Floor Plan

- A Office-Nursery
- B Master Bedroom
- C Bathroom
- D Front Entrance
- E Living Room
- F Kitchen-Dining Area
- G Back Entrance
- H Deck
- I Workshop

The backyard sports a sequence of raised flower and vegetable beds and two green roofs—one atop the workshop and other atop the back entrance (above). A Coral pendant lamp by David Trubridge hangs in the dining area (above right).

First Floor

