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A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a light-colored patterned short-sleeved shirt and dark pants, stands on a wooden deck. She is holding a silver watering can and watering plants. The deck is surrounded by lush greenery and flowers. In the background, there is a house with a modern addition featuring corrugated metal siding and a balcony with a metal railing. The sky is bright and overcast.

METRO HOME

Mh

Three in One

A 19th-century farmhouse gets a contemporary add-on.

ASID Kitchen & Bath Tour guide

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3 IN 1

Charlie and Jennifer Phelps's contemporary farmhouse.

by chris clayton

photos by
sara rubinstein

→ **The dogs won't yawn on command today.** "Any other time," says Charlie Phelps with mock frustration. Rather than perform stupid pet tricks for their master, the two Welsh corgis are content drooling on the slate tile entryway of the home they share with the Phelps posse: Charlie, his wife, Jennifer, and 15-year-old twins Duncan and Henry. You can't blame the pups for being sluggish. It's hot outside. Too hot to yawn, even. The twins, having disappeared to the basement for an impromptu game of ping-pong, seem equally thrilled about dancing for the press. "Come on guys!" yells Jennifer, corralling them for our photo shoot. "Don't you want to be famous?"

Duncan and Henry Phelps show off their lacrosse skills in the backyard. The addition sits to the right, the farmhouse to the left.





The kitchen is located in what was once a standalone cabin on the property, the walls of which can be seen here and in the dining room.

Two ferocious corgis guard the entryway that marks the start of the addition.



It's a typical domestic scene, but one played by gifted actors. Jennifer is head curator at the brave and beloved Burnet Art Gallery in downtown Minneapolis. Charlie runs a software company. When not attending Breck School (or darting around its lacrosse field), Duncan and Henry make graffiti art, such as the stencils, tags and spray-paint ghosts adorning a fort in the backyard.

And where do these overachievers reconvene after conquering the world? On eight acres of shade trees and restored prairie in the outer wilds of the west metro—in one, two or three homes, depending on how you look at it. We see three: the contemporary addition that starts at the entryway and runs south; the adjoining 19th-century farmhouse to the north; and the one-room log cabin tucked into the farmhouse like a big Russian nesting doll. Realtors and historical societies date the cabin back to the 1840s, when it likely served as a water stop for wagon trains. The farmhouse swallowed it whole in the 1860s, and subsequent sheetrock applications hid it away completely until the homeowners prior to Charlie and Jennifer found some funny looking wood during a remodel. The logs have since remained exposed, giving the kitchen and dining room a distinct *Little-House-on-the-Prairie* vibe (look closely and you can see the original hatchet marks in the wood).

Living room as contemporary fantasia. We're in love with the AstroTurf rug in the middle of the room.



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The farmhouse sat alone on the property when the Phelps's bought it in 1993. At 1,400 square feet, it was plenty of space for two, but things got cramped when the twins were born. The couple's pal James Dayton came to the rescue, dreaming up an addition in 2001. Dayton—then a rising name in local architecture; now a design A-lister—proposed a separate shelter to match the traditional exterior and add contemporary flair indoors. A new entrance, shielded in corrugated galvanized steel, would connect the old half with the new.

"I didn't want an appendage that looked like it didn't belong," says Jennifer of the add-on. "Jim's a great listener and understood what we wanted immediately." Nine months later, the Phelps family had their breathing room: an office and living room on the main floor; a master suite upstairs for mom and dad; and a finished basement.

The star of the expansion is the living room, which boasts ample natural light, a stucco fireplace, apple-ply shelving, an exposed wood ceiling, adventurous décor selected by the homeowners themselves (note the AstroTurf rug and plastic benches) and art that mirrors Jennifer's catch-all curatorial approach at the Burnet. (Though when it came time to

Modern art and old-school décor collide in the dining room.



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Architect James Dayton designed the vanity in the master bath.

place the work—Day of the Dead skulls, photos by Chris Larson and Jock Sturges, a towering abstract painting by John Chilver that the family calls its “fifth roommate”—Charlie stepped in. “I have a hard time placing artwork in my house,” explains Jennifer. “I can do it in the gallery in two seconds, but, I don’t know, it has to be perfect at home.”

If the addition is the architectural equivalent of culinary gastronomy—experimental and a little flashy—then the antique side is comfort food. A cozy family room and screen porch sit just off the kitchen and dining room. Duncan and Henry live upstairs in the home’s original bedrooms. When they were young, the boys’ preferred means of reaching their parents’ room was to scamper across the outdoor breezeway above the entrance. If they decided to play “knights” along the way, then so be it (“There used to be lots of make-believe battles up there,” says Jennifer with a laugh).

Despite the disparate styles throughout, the home hangs together remarkably well thanks to Dayton’s smart, contemporary solution and Jennifer and Charlie’s fearless design sense (is that a sculptural elephant head hanging in the *Little House* dining room? Why, yes, it is). Such eclecticism runs the risk of being hokey or jarring or pretentious, but here it’s as natural and down-to-earth as the family itself.

Unsurprisingly, the Phelps clan views their house as a single entity. “You can sit in the living room and look all the way down to the old half,” says Jennifer. “I like that. There’s a nice flow to the place.” That’s a nonchalant take on such an extraordinary dwelling, but maybe that’s just her way of saying, “Of course our house is a madcap cocktail of old and new. Why wouldn’t it be?” Henry echoes this sentiment after posing for our camera: “I didn’t know how cool my house was until one of my friends came over and asked if she could move in.” +

4 things we learned from the Phelps home

1. Eclectic is good.

Architecture and interior design too often display just one facet of a homeowner. Do as Jennifer and Charlie do and let all sides of your personality inform your digs.

2. You can never have too much art.

Paintings, photographs, hanging corn-on-the-cob sculptures and other visual delights appear throughout the Phelps home, acting as the glue that holds together its various aesthetics.

3. Ask your architect to make you something.

Architects are often good with their hands. James Dayton not only designed the couple’s addition, he built them shelves for the family room and a double-sink vanity for the master bath.

4. Reuse.

Jennifer’s grandma’s ornate mirrors hang in the master bath. The wood-plank walkway leading up to the home’s entrance is made from an old fence the couple found on their property.



Vitals

Architectural Style: Contemporary Farmhouse

Year Built: Cabin, 1840s; farmhouse, 1860s; addition, 2002

Addition architect: James Dayton

Addition contractor: Anderson Woodcraft

Lot size: 8.3 acres

Bedrooms: 3

Baths: 4.5

City: Maple Plain

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