

# Making a Flat Roof Work

by Jamie Fisher

**A**void doing flat-roofed additions, and not just because of the potential leaks. In my view (and that of most clients), an addition should take its architectural cues from the house to which it is being added. Since a house's roof is its most essential feature, unless the house itself has a flat roof, a flat-roofed addition runs a high risk of looking as if it doesn't belong.

However, sometimes a flat roof is virtually unavoidable. Here's one I wasn't able to avoid, and it points up some of the challenges.

The program was a common one: a total kitchen remodel, along with the addition of a family room and a small library (see Figure 1). The house was a 1920 one-and-a-half story bungalow over a daylight basement, typical of the houses I work on.

## Accepting a Flat Reality

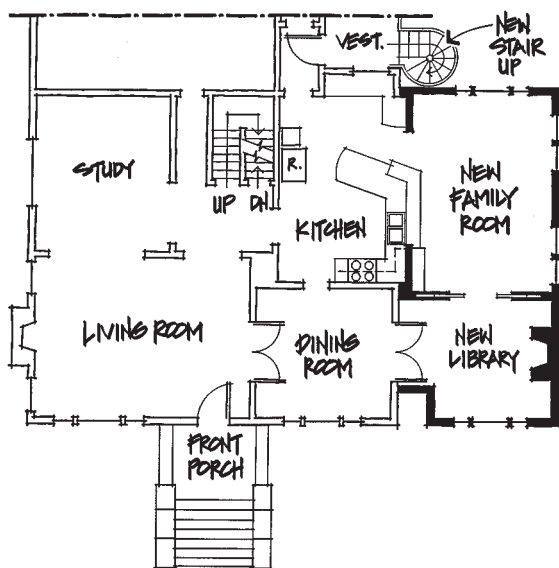
First I proposed simply extending the form of the existing house (the easy way out). But this required adding second-story space that the owner didn't need or want to pay for (Figure 2). Then I tried

a hip-roofed addition, which looked like the cheap, uninspired eyesore that it was. The owner, being fond of her beautiful house, hated that one too.

Finally, after a couple of even less successful schemes, I had to accept that this was going to be a flat-roofed addition. The solution I finally settled on is shown in Figure 3, next page. I was determined to find ways to make this addition avoid the tacked-on, boxy appearance of so many flat-roofed additions.

To do so, I worked to make the addition — while unmistakably a different

## Family Room Addition



**Figure 1.** The owners of this bungalow wanted a full-width addition with a family room and library. The author's challenge was how to tie in the roof.

## Proposed Solutions



**Figure 2.** The first proposed solution called for a simple extension of the roof over the new addition (top), which was rejected because it added extra space at considerable expense. The second proposal, a single-story hip-roofed addition (bottom), looked bad.

# Flat Roof Solution



**Figure 3.** In the end, the author and client decided on a flat roof. The addition uses the same siding and trim as the existing house, while the railing on top and the 3-foot-wide reveal between house and addition let the addition stand comfortably beside the main house despite its lack of a pitched roof.

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animal from the main house — nonetheless sympathetic to it. For instance, the addition shares several common elements with the main house, such as its siding, windows, and

trim. More important, it also shares the notion that proper buildings have a base, a middle, and a top. The addition, while not having a visible roof, has a top nonetheless — in the form of the

elaborate ornamental railing that is its most prominent visual element.

The addition also attaches to the house without interfering with the original eaves and soffits. This could have been accomplished by setting the addition back from the main house; but since the owner needed an addition as deep as the main house, we instead used a deep 3-foot reveal that visually pulls the two masses apart. This allows both house and addition to display their salient architectural features (roof in the case of the main house, pilasters and mitered moldings in the case of the addition) without slamming them into each other.

The owner loved the scheme, but there's still one problem: Now that the addition has a flat roof, she wants a deck on top and access by stair from the back yard — perhaps the subject of a future article.



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