

Court House; single-family residential; Washington D.C.

Court House is a renovation of an existing rowhouse, the front of which had a setback far greater than any other rowhouse on the block. The design embraces the existing conditions and uses the quirky setback in the front to the client's advantage. Due to budget constraints rather than infill that portion of the site with more interior square footage, we elected to create a rarity among rowhouses – an entry courtyard. The court is created through the construction of a screen that completes the street-wall of existing facades. The private outdoor space feels interwoven with the interior, reinforced by new large openings in the existing façade and by using the same flooring material both inside and out. The whimsical yet functional façade allows for privacy, interjects delight, and--in its placement and scale--respects context. The sinewy steel “ribbons” help shield the inner façade from the harshest late afternoon sun yet still allow views out from the interior. The entire house is a conversation between serious and playful. The limited palette allows for the individual elements to stand out and shine independently.

The design addresses a number of difficult problems: renovating an existing structure in poor condition; the desire to add program without the ability to add space; turning a quirky, oddball building into a good neighbor, while maintaining a uniqueness. By reorganizing the floor plan and with a careful editing of materials and palette, this small home meets the challenges set for it. The outdoor spaces created in both the front and back, take advantage of the existing conditions and extend the home's functional space and usability while still allowing the project to meet the tight budget. An effort was made to create an architectural language that is consistent throughout, yet has a bit of “space” in it for your imagination to fill in the gaps. The tile in the kitchen and bathrooms, the safety bars on the rear porch, and the triangular extension to the master bedroom are all examples of elements that reference each other and create a dialogue. The steel façade is the intentional outlier, playful yet serious, hard yet soft.

The concept of the entry courtyard paired with the rear screened porch bookends the main living space and makes the small interior feel much larger than it is in reality. Perhaps even more importantly, the existing chopped up interior was completely reorganized. The original stair, which ran transverse to the floor plan and divided the house into “front” and “back”, was moved to the side to open up the lower level. This allowed for natural light to be brought from the second floor via its former opening as well as a more flexible layout to fit the added program. We were tasked with converting the two-bedroom home into three bedrooms, which required careful organizing of the second floor to avoid constricting spaces. Skylights in the bathrooms and a clerestory in the main hall create a sense of openness and turn seemingly simple moves into a complex spatial geometry.





front, before



front, after



rear, before



rear, after



entrance court with green wall



kitchen



screened porch



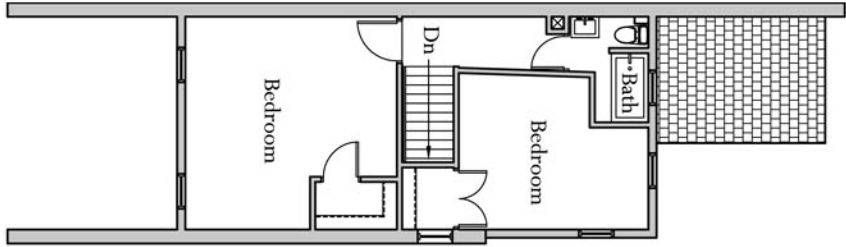
dining



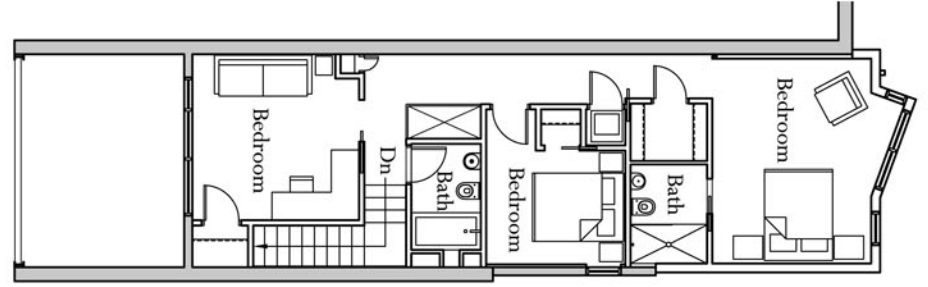
bathroom



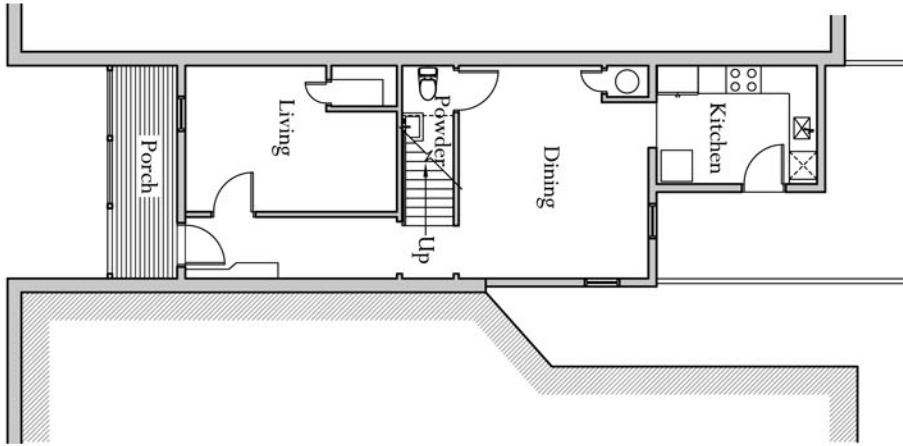
second floor light well, view toward front



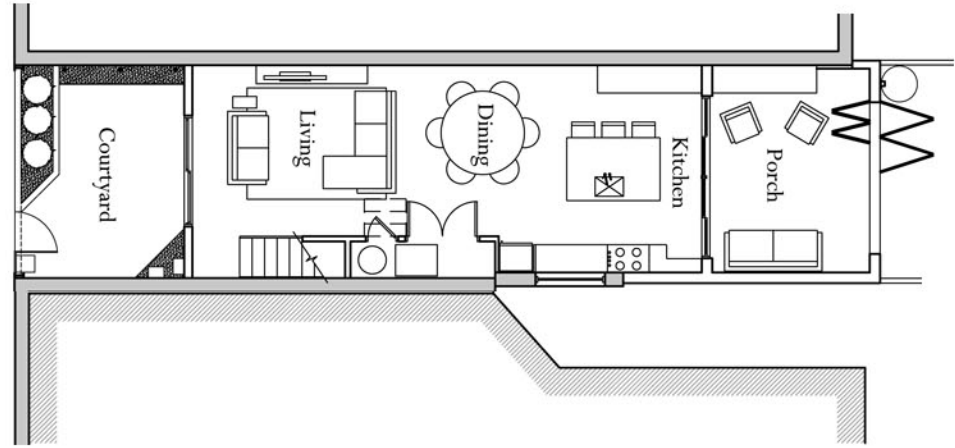
second floor - existing



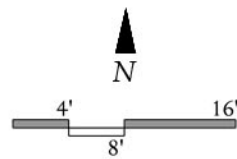
second floor - new



first floor - existing



first floor - new





entrance facade