



# Country Cottage In The City

A thoughtful remodel melds contemporary convenience with a connection to the past.

BY CAROLYN CROOKE

**A** lot of my friends go to their cabins for the summer, but living here is like having a vacation home in the middle of a great city," says Jeffrey Siegel of his recently remodeled Nicollet Island home. "I can go to restaurants or the Guthrie and then walk home to a Nantucket-style country cottage on a river."

The 1860s-era structure has a view of downtown skyscrapers. Museum-quality Lutron lighting illuminates serious art and whimsical flea-market finds alike. Lively juxtapositions abound, but look a little closer, and it's a masterful blend of the old and the new, right down to the state-of-the-art wiring inside the ancient walls.

The Greek Revival-style, gable-front house began its life near the University of Minnesota. It was remodeled and added to over the years and finally slated for demolition in the 1980s, prompting its owners to donate the home to the Historic Minneapolis Foundation. Siegel purchased it, with a commitment to move it to one of five vacant lots on Nicollet Island set aside for such homes and to restore it according to historical-preservation guidelines. Siegel completed the move and preliminary remodels and then rented it out while preparing for a full-scale refurbishing.

When the time came, Siegel tapped TreHus Architects + Interior Designers + Builders to spearhead the ambitious project. "The people at TreHus have the sensibilities of Old World tradesmen.

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**serene city living** The north end of Nicollet Island is known for beautifully refurbished homes that exemplify turn-of-the-century architectural styles. TreHus restored and matched the siding and exterior features, and modelled a white picket fence on archival photography from the area.

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The quality of their craftsmanship is absolutely first class — on everything,” notes Siegel, who owns Supply Studio, an entertainment production company.

The remodel involved a range of professionals, from architects to artists to lighting consultants — as well as permits from the Minneapolis Historic Preservation Commission and the Minneapolis Park Board. Nearly every room was altered in some way; many were changed significantly. For example, the old kitchen and powder room, located at the back of the home, were gutted. TreHus put a new powder room in a different spot and designed and created a large, open kitchen.

Even though the square footage was increased, the changes stayed true to the home’s petite proportions. Things tend to run three-quarters of contemporary sizes, including cabinetry, fixtures and appliances; at 24 inches, the range in the kitchen is the smallest that Viking makes. “I thought the idea of an industrial range in miniature was interesting,” says Siegel.

Inset cabinetry, bead-board accents, carrera-marble countertops, an apron-front sink and tongue-and-groove boards on the walls set the Old World mood. And in an I-wish-I’d-thought-of-that move, Siegel added a living room-style seating area at one end of the kitchen, complete with couch and chairs. “After all, the kitchen is where people congregate,” he points out.

Thanks to the fact that the home was moved, there’s a full basement — one of the few on the island (most of the other homes have cellars and crawl spaces). The team finished the lower-level space, adding a secondary catering kitchen just steps below the main kitchen. There’s also a guest room, small dining area, and three-quarters bath down there.



In old photographs, you can see that a summer kitchen once stood at the very rear of the house. It’s been gone for decades, but, working off these images, TreHus recreated it — in this incarnation, as a mud room.

For this addition, the original siding was stripped, repaired and finished, and custom siding was milled to match the original. Craftspeople also reconditioned existing windows wherever possible, stripping

casings, refitting weights and refurbishing storms. While lower-maintenance combination storms would have met guidelines, Siegel prefers the look of the originals. As he puts it, “We avoided some of the permitted compromises.”

One of the major challenges came with bringing the mechanicals up to date. Existing radiators were frozen and unusable, so TreHus scoured the area and salvaged just-

**a room of one’s own** A 1950s-era kitchen was gutted entirely and replaced with an open kitchen, complete with a fanciful hutch, painted and detailed to look like an original, and topped with a cypress counter.



right radiators. For cooling, new duct work was carefully threaded through century-old framing, and existing electrical was replaced.

Looking back, Siegel notes that everybody involved brought smart solutions to the project. "I knew TreHus was great at the beginning of this, but I liked them even more at the end."

The feeling is mutual. TreHus president and owner Dave Amundson admires Siegel's strong vision. "He's very artistic, very involved. This was a complicated project — we trusted each other, worked ethically with each other, and we collaborated to come up with absolutely excellent solutions." **AL**

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**attention to detail** Many of the changes here brought the home back to its original simplicity. Sophisticated millwork added in the 1970s was replaced with flat borders. Painted stair treads were stripped. Newels and balustrades were restored.