PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The Little Car That Could
A Spokane father and son think small to solve the stall

BY DEAN STAHL
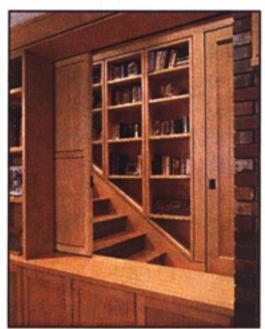PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

Parting, Respectfully

A stylish new space honors another era with brick and beams

YOU MIGHT call Nils Finne an architect's architect. He has renovated and updated three Seattle houses designed by architect Arthur B. Loveless and built early in the last century.

Finne first became acquainted with his predecessor seven years ago, when a Washington Park couple asked him to remodel the master bedroom in their rambling, English cottage-style house overlooking Lake Washington.

The latest of his projects began with the couple's request to refurbish the damp, gloomy spare bedroom in the basement into a space for kids. The couple's son and daughter, now 17 and 12, often have friends over, so it can get noisy.

Through several conversations, the list of needs and desires grew. The result is a

Builders replaced a wood deck off the dining room with a brick terrace, then brought an exterior wall out 4 feet to fashion a roof for the basement-level addition. The architect needed headroom for an interior stairway, so he disguised his stairwell pop-up as a brick planter, center.

A fir bookcase lines the new stairway down from the main floor. A small pocket door at counter level can be pulled closed to help sound-proof the entertainment area.

stunning combination guest suite and entertainment/family room.

Finne aimed for the new construction to look distinctive yet honor the Loveless sense of proportion and fondness for sturdy brick and dark timbers. He tried to bridge the eras and respect the character of the home principally through use of exposed beams, brick and stucco for the interior.

The project evolved quickly. Finne devised a way to build a large room off the old bedroom by expanding under the wooden dining-room deck, which was

rebuilt as a brick terrace.

He kept the new room open to accommodate the flow of frequent social gatherings and added a couple of disguised doors to stanch noise when kids took over.

The roughly 18-by-32-foot room is as multipurpose as they come. It has a window seat on the north end for readers. Custom fir cabinets on the opposite wall disguise a large-screen television and audio gear. The room also holds a regulation-size pool table, a chess set with table, a comfortable sofa and a built-in desk for business guests' use.

This space connects to a stylish guest suite a few steps up on the old basement level, where there's now a bedroom, half bath and kitchenette. The original exterior brick wall has been incorporated into the interior scheme.

The addition's most striking feature is its vaulted ceiling. Laminated-beam ribs arc overhead, roughened with hand tools to look old and stained the color of strong coffee to stand out against light-colored plaster. There is a grotto-like feel to the place. This is where old-world charm and Seattle style clink glasses.

Although a vaulted ceiling is not in the Loveless style, Finne says he was inspired by vaulted doorways elsewhere in the house.

"Bringing new dimensions to a historic building is tightrope-walking," Finne says. "Generally, I was striving for a more open feel. I hope Arthur Loveless forgives us for that."

The ceiling added to the complexity of the contractor's task, although the foundation posed the greatest challenge.

Builders had to excavate a few steps below the original basement level so the new curved roof could be capped with a second, waterproof lid to support the brick-topped dining-room terrace. Because access to the hillside was extremely limited, excavated soil was moved up and out with hand tools and ➤

This multipurpose room offers a window seat for readers, places for games in the center and ample space for guests to mingle during frequent arts-related gatherings. The original brick exterior wall is at the far left, near the guest-suite entry.