



# Historic Symmetry

*Building on Bozeman's elegant heritage,  
Bitnar Architects and Langlas & Associates  
update an historic home for the 21st century*

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*A*s a girl, Ileana Indreland remembers Sunday drives through the historic neighborhoods of Bozeman, Montana. Compared to her family's working ranch in nearby Cokedale, the trimmed lawns, three-story houses and the elegant architecture of town seemed ornate. One house in



particular — a graceful brick home with fluted columns and three gables on the top floor — captured her imagination.

“Whenever we’d pass this house, I’d wonder how it looked inside and what it would be like to live in a house like that,” she reflects with a smile as she sits in the sunroom of the very house she admired as a child.

Realizing a childhood dream, Ileana and her husband Michael Delaney purchased the 1913-era home and neighboring structure in 2006. Accustomed to making swift decisions in their real estate and development business, Delaney and Company, the couple assembled an A-team to renovate and modernize the house. Drawing on the expertise of Thomas Bitnar of Bitnar





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Architects, and general contractor Langlas & Associates in Bozeman, they set out to build an addition that matched the historic architecture and return the Georgian Colonial Revival Style residence to its intended grandeur.

Ambling along South Willson Avenue you'll see nearly every style of western architecture: dollhouse Victorians; classic clapboard farmhouses; Spanish Colonial Revival Style with terra cotta-tile roof; elaborate Tudors; Sear's Catalog kit homes and Craftsman Style. The architectural language of each historic residence is like a page in the book of this Montana town — a tale of dreamers who brought ideas they hoped would turn to success. This street was where Bozeman's economic and cultural elite built their homes beginning in 1883 when the Northern Pacific Railroad came to town. This was the boulevard of bankers, doctors, cattle barons, lawyers, dentists who all shaped the culture of the town through their elaborate homes, as well as with their business endeavors.

In 1884 an article in the *Avant Courier* commented on the fashionable residences along Willson Avenue (formerly Central Avenue): "Central Avenue is developing into a Bon Ton residential street in Bozeman." Bon Ton is a Victorian-era expression meaning "the finest." Even today, the wide boulevard speaks volumes to the finer bygone era, with many homes that have been preserved to honor the original architecture. But few are as carefully restored as the Delaney residence.

The Doric-columned portico, with a half-circle fanlight above the door are just hints of the custom-finishes inside. Stepping through the front door to the polished

**Previous page:** Maile, the beloved Westy, greets visitors at the threshold of Ileana Indreland and Michael Delaney's historic Georgian Colonial Revival Style home in Bozeman. The home was designed by architect Fred Willson in 1913. **Inset:** Croquet is set in the expansive yard that was inspired by French gardens and serves to accentuate the classic symmetry of the regal home. **Opposite page:** In the living room original stained glass windows light the timeless interiors that Ileana Indreland cultivated with Bozeman interior designer Helen Kent of Kent Interiors. **This page:** The graphic quality of a Harlequin-pattern tile backsplash creates a focal point in the clean-lined contemporary kitchen, Montana Tile and Stone was a source of inspiration as Indreland selected tile, granite and marble accents throughout the house.



swoop of a mahogany staircase, oriental carpets, antiques and walls filled with fine art is like stepping back in time to an era when living was not such a casual affair. The handpainted antique wallpaper (French and English), original stained glass windows, a ballroom, chandeliers and vignettes for art create a lovely sense of refinement that stems from the history embedded in these walls as much as from the beautiful things.

“We love historic projects,” said Indreland. “We didn’t want to disturb any of the old architecture, our intention was to create a seamless addition.” She speaks of being a caretaker to the house, more than an owner, preserving its character and history is important for generations to come.

Built in 1913 the home was designed by Bozeman architect Fred F. Willson (whose father General L.S. Willson was the namesake for Willson Avenue) for Dr. James F. Blair and his family. The Blairs lived here for only a couple of years before selling it to the Lovelace family and later to the Richards. It was bought and sold a few more times; each owner revered its legacy. Mike and Ileana are only the fifth owners in the home’s 97-year life. As a significant design by Willson, the home is on the National Historic Register.

Educated at Montana State College and then Columbia University in New York and finally at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Fred Willson brought a depth to his architectural design. According to

**Left:** In the dining room handpainted antique wallpaper from France and an original stained glass window add elegant detail to the home. **Opposite:** Original handpainted English wallpaper from the 1920s balances the masculine tone of the “cigar room.” Langlas & Associates were able to restore the original oak flooring and Craftsman light fixtures designed by Fred Willson.

Bitnar, Willson's breadth of work is responsible for cultivating the eclectic architectural language of Bozeman, one that is also a reflection of America-the-melting-pot.

Bitnar brings a similar aesthetic in his own design projects that range from ultra-modern to historic renovation. A native of Prague, Czech Republic, Bitnar is naturally influenced by European sensibilities and over 36 years of practice he has fostered a body of work that represents contextual, regional modern architecture.

He worked with the Delaney's and Langlas on the luxury development, The Village Downtown, which incorporates classic Georgian Style detailing that was inspired by the prominent features of the South Willson home. In this project, Bitnar felt an obligation to honor the important architectural history of the building.

"I took the knowledge of the historical approach and applied the same symmetry in the new areas," Bitnar explained. "My design created a northern entrance that still accommodated the flow of modern living and honored the original



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architecture with a semi-formal entrance.”

The fact that the roof, heating system, wiring and plaster walls needed to be replaced, yet matched to the early 20th century Georgian level of detail was the challenge for Steve Langlas and his construction crew. “The Langlas team was amazing,” Ileana recalled, “they stayed on point throughout the whole project.”

Most challenging from a construction standpoint, however, was building the two-story addition to more than double the size of the original 1,000-square-foot residence. Matching century-year-old oak flooring, wood trim, custom doors and scale was the goal, along with creating a functional home replete with an open kitchen for entertaining, an indoor pool and master suite, all while maintaining the historic integrity of the original structure brought out the highest level of performance from Langlas & Associates.

With a hand in every detail, Bitnar focused on the point of Georgian Revival Style architecture: symmetry. Originally the house was designed to represent order and balance with its crisp, matching shapes; Bitnar enhanced this intention by

drawing the addition on the centerline. For instance, the side entrance marks the beginning of the new construction with a portico that replicates the grander front door and leads to the kitchen. That door lines up directly with a set of French doors that open out to a patio and the expanse of formal garden. Additionally, the pool house addition mirrors the original conservatory sunroom in scale and style.

Ironically, it is the formal garden, designed by Bitnar and installed by Cashman Nursery, that cinches the striking impact of this historic home. The garden, with a reflecting pool, manicured lawn framed by evergreens, balances the tall structure and draws life outdoors, creating a masterful bridge to the formal architectural language with that quintessential Montana love for bringing the outside-in.

Appearances aside, what makes this house resonate for Ileana and Mike remains the history.

“It’s more than a house,” said Ileana. “Over the years we’ve had people who have visited and shared their memories in this house, it’s hearing those personal life experiences that are the joy of owning a historic home.” **II**

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