

Shawn and Shaila Lewis turn home's potential into a reality

By Ruth Hultz

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In 1992, Shawn and Shaila Lewis bought the Wilber and Rachel Thompson house at 307 S. 16th because they liked the neighborhood and saw the home's potential. Since then, working side by side, they have redone the house inside and out.

The Lewises began remodeling their circa 1915 home as soon as they moved in, and for four years worked late into the night and on weekends.

Luckily for the Lewises, the home's beautiful oak trim and floors were in good shape and they could concentrate

on other projects.

They removed plaster, moved walls, closed off doorways, added closets and drywalled ceilings. They rewired and replumbed much of the house and wired each room for speakers.

The Lewises rearranged the first-floor rooms. First they switched the living room and dining room. They made a dream laundry room from an unworkable kitchen, which had six doors. They enlarged a tiny powder room and turned a dark, add-on family room into a sunny kitchen/computer center.

The new kitchen was a two-year project. Shaila designed it, with plenty of

windows, cabinets, counter space and a full view of the backyard. The Lewises gutted, insulated and dry-walled the former family room themselves. Then they hired Steve Hashmeyer to carry out the rest of her plan.

Working with Hashmeyer was a treat. "He is a real craftsman," said Shawn. "I like working with him because he'll spend time with you on making what you want."

Shaila found the home's original wooden Venetian blinds in the attic and spent one summer patiently painting, retaping and re-cording slats for six sets of blinds.

Shaila loves decorating and spends hours poring over decorating magazines. She redid every room, wallpapering and using creative painting techniques and unique window treatments to create a "garden-like feeling" throughout the house.

Working together, the Lewises hung hundreds of rolls of wallpaper and agree, "We work pretty good together."

While they make a good team, Shawn said, "the house was more Shaila's hobby than mine." Luckily for Shaila, she said, Shawn is "mechanically inclined" and they had plenty of family and friends to help.

A major upstairs job was enlarging and redoing the bathroom. Shawn reworked and installed the original gravity-flow toilet they found in the basement and had the bathtub's claw feet gold-plated. A pedestal sink and a shower finished off the family-sized bathroom.

The outside of the house needed plen-



ty of attention, as well. The Lewises reroofed the house's steeply pitched hip roof as well as the garage's, and painted the house.

They redid the landscaping and, using bricks from torn-up sidewalks, made a brick patio and created a "quaint, private" backyard for their family.

Four Square vernacular homes like the Lewises' were one of the most popular house types built from 1900 to 1920, partly because plans were available in mail-order catalogs.

A vernacular house is one that is influenced more by local climate, available building materials and ethnic building traditions than by any specific style of architecture.

Four Square homes are always two stories, have a rectangular "footprint" shape, a hip roof and a front porch the width of the house. Any stylistic influences on Four Square houses are usually found on the front porch.