



THE REAL ESTATE PROFILE

APARTMENTS & HOMES

Home Improvement

A light and airy home

Renovated by a contractor with design sense

You can learn a great deal about the interiors of the home that Chris Donatelli recently finished rehabbing at Southport and Wellington by carefully examining the exterior facades.

On the other hand, you won't learn much about Donatelli by looking at him. His youthful appearance and pleasant demeanor conceal the determination, intelligence and organizational talents that have enabled him to become a successful real estate developer and contractor while most of his peers are swinging a hammer for an hourly wage. And Donatelli would rather that you focus on his work than on his age.

The south-facing rear facade of the home at Wellington and Southport tells you unambiguously that inside you'll find light — and lots of it — and a mix of formal and informal spaces.

Donatelli, who prides himself on being a "contractor with design sense," overruled the architect, who suggested double-hung windows with transoms for this side of the home, which is a fifteen foot deep, 3-story addition to the original structure.

In Donatelli's completed version, identical rows of clerestory windows repeat at the first and second levels of the home. They cap matching sets of operable side windows. On the first level, the side windows frame a tri-panel sliding glass door opening onto a sizable deck ringed by tubular pipe railings. The side windows repeat on the third level, where they are capped

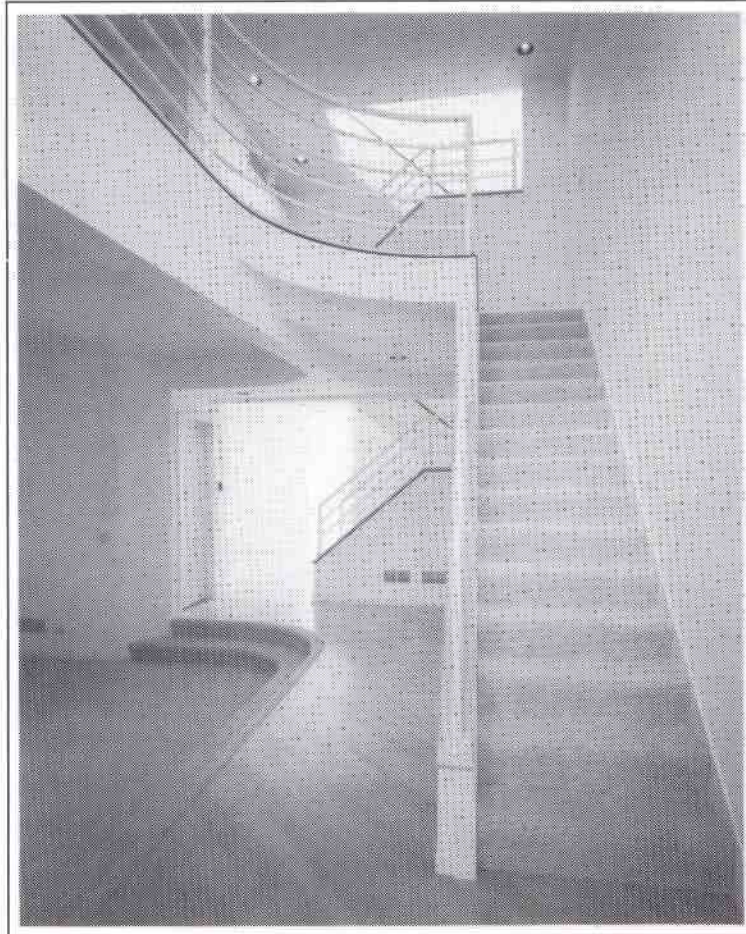
by clerestory windows that pitch upward to the center of the home.

In all, the rear facade incorporates 37 windows. At the first level they flood a kitchen and family room with light while allowing the rear deck and back yard to be visually part of the informal living areas of the home. At the second and third levels, the combination of flanking windows and clerestories pours light into bedrooms while affording wall space for flexible furniture placement. The third floor bedroom, as can be seen from the exterior, has a high cathedral ceiling.

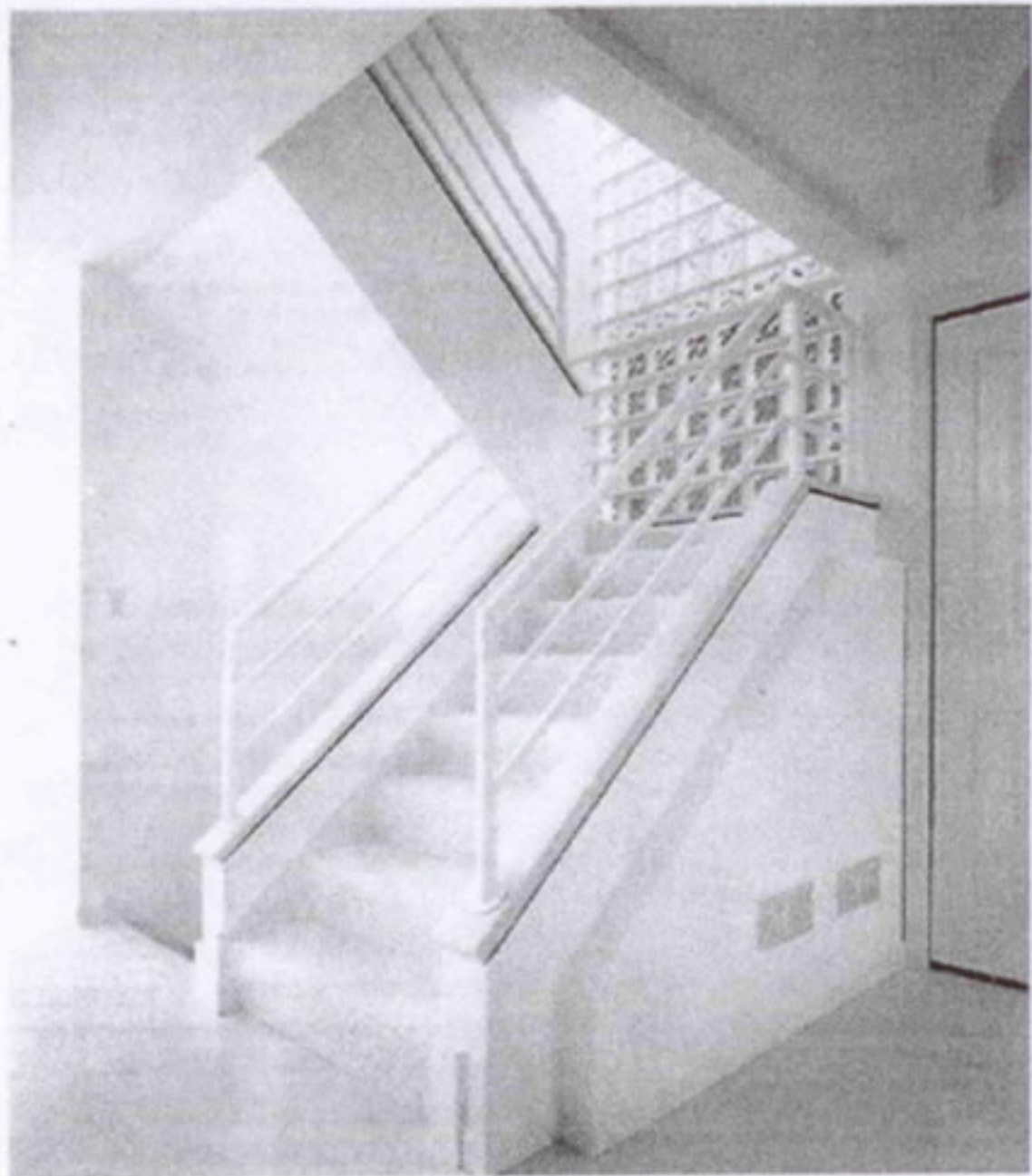
The clerestories, together with the siding and the pipe railings, provide strong horizontal elements that visually mask the height of the addition. The overall effect is tightly geometric and hints of the careful detailing on the interior of the home.

In the center of the building, on the west wall, is a dramatic thirty-foot high expanse of glass block, behind which is the central stairwell of the home.

The front facade is also heavily punctuated with windows. The pipe railings are repeated, flanking front stairs that rise to an intermediate level landing and again to a covered front porch. "The front is very traditional," says Donatelli. "I wanted it to blend in with other homes in the area. The painting and the detailing emphasize continuity with the past. At the same time, the use of materials is totally responsive to today's low maintenance requirements. I used stains rather than paints, and a more expensive cedar



At night, recessed lighting highlights the soffits and curves.



The Great Wall Of Glass

Unique window installations bring a Chicago home out from the dark

Converting an 80-year-old two flat into a modern, four-level, single-family home would seem, by itself, a difficult task for any remodeler and architect. Chris Donatelli, president of Donatelli Remodelers & Builders Inc. in Park Ridge, Ill., and Chris George, president of Chris George Architects in Chicago, however, were challenged by much more.

Their new design was confined by the home's narrow lot size (25 feet wide) and, typical of many Chicago lots, the neighboring homes that stood just a few feet away, leaving the home's interior in dire need of some natural light. Also, Donatelli, who bought the home for future sale, wanted to create a contemporary interior while keeping the exterior in tune with the traditional appearance of the neighborhood.

After gutting the interior, lengthening the building by 15 feet, and excavating the basement, Donatelli and George addressed the main objective of the new design—bringing a lot of light into the center of the building. Installing a 30-foot high glass block wall on the west side of the home greatly contributed to their goal. "Now, the home gets a lot of light, but you don't have people looking in, and you don't have to look out and see the neighbor's brick wall," Donatelli said.

At the back of the house, 37 windows, including casements, transoms, and a triple French door, pour even more sunlight into the center of the building. "We used standard windows to create a custom look," George said.



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siding on the front to create a 'hassle-free' covering for the front facade. The front portions of the roofs are cedar — all clear rather than rough sawn — and all primed prior to installation. The initial cost of the cedar is much higher, but it's a material that will last."

A peek inside

Donatelli, who is in his mid-twenties, came into the building business in part because his dad was involved in it. He began working part-time as a laborer at the age of fourteen, and learned his carpentry skills by working alongside the "real craftsmen" who were employed by his father.

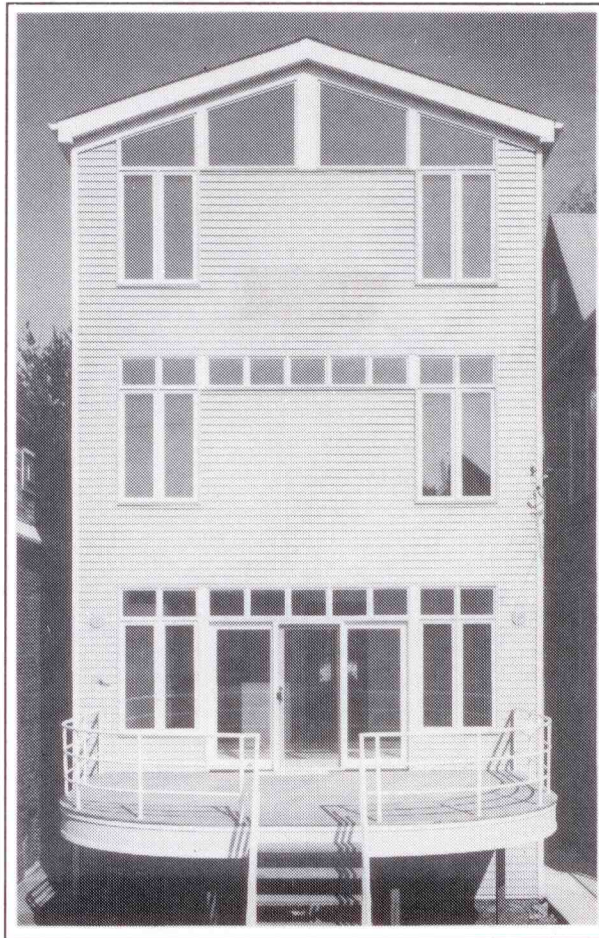
As someone "who has always been motivated and set goals for myself," he progressed to being a contractor for a number of developers. While working on the original St. Michael's church renovation project for Bob Lundergan of Chicago Landmark Developers, he became enamored with the "thought of taking something that had no use and turning it into something that could be enjoyed."

When you step inside the home at Wellington and Southport you immediately see Donatelli's background in construction — and his urge to create enjoyment.

The floor plates of the original building were completely rebuilt and, on the first level, raised to allow greater ceiling heights in the basement and a sunken living room effect. The bold geometry of the exterior facades is carried into the interior, most noticeably in the staircases, but is softened and accented by curved walls and recesses and the gently curving lip of the sunken portion of the living room.

Natural oak flooring is laid at a diagonal to emphasize the openness of the living level and to create continuity and provide a visual draw into the kitchen area. "The diagonal floors create length and depth in the visual field, a stretched look." The effect is both striking and pleasing.

As you examine the living areas carefully, Donatelli seems to have capitalized on a variety of subtle and tasteful ways of turning flat surfaces into slightly built-up planes that speak of craftsmanship without imposing or calling undue attention to themselves. At night, recessed



lighting highlights the soffits and curves.

In building the home Donatelli strived to achieve the light and airy feeling of the house without compromising on energy efficiency. The exterior walls of the home are framed in 2 x 6 lumber and the glass block is insulated. The heating and cooling systems are zoned and carefully designed.

The second level of the house has a luxurious, private master suite with a large walk-in closet, a 2-person whirlpool and steam in an all-marble bath and a control center for the home's alarm system. Transom windows draw light from the central glass block wall into the master bath, whose cabinets were custom-designed and milled. With an eye to convenience, the laundry is located adjacent to the master bedroom. Also on this level is an open, lofted family room with bay window and woodburning fireplace.

The third level houses second and third bedrooms, and a full bath. The 17 by 20 foot rear bedroom at this level has a 13-foot cathedral ceiling, and was designed to be easily partitioned into two bedrooms if a family needed that option. The home also has a full basement and a 2-car garage.

"This is definitely a family home," says Donatelli. "The second level is private, an adults area with space for relaxation and lots of flexibility."

A belief in specialization

With his flair for design, attention to detail, understanding of people's needs and structural mastery, where is Donatelli headed next?

His company, Donatelli Remodelers & Builders, Inc., has a varied general contracting business for clients — offices, restaurants, and residential facade renovations, room additions and whole-house renovations. He plans to expand in a controlled fashion. "I believe in specialization," he says. "My job as a general contractor is to put it all together, to build something functional and livable. And I still enjoy being a carpenter, working with the tools on all my jobs, so I don't want to grow too quickly."