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Prairie inspired

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By Maureen Alley, assistant editor

Creating a home that features harmony among all aspects is just one of the main principles in Prairie-style architecture. Inspired by architects such as George Maher, Walter Burley Griffin and Frank Lloyd Wright, the Prairie style still takes shape today. Stephen Jaskowiak, president and owner of Elmhurst, Ill.-based West Studio is one example of a design/build firm that bases its practice on Prairie-style architecture.

West Studio wanted to keep the garage from dominating the lot. Step-backs were used to accomplish this. The living room and patio were pulled forward and a flower box drapes over the garage.

This home was inspired by the Prairie school of architecture and architects such as George Maher, Walter Burley Griffin and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Visual separation is a key to the theme of this home. Shapes and ceiling heights were used rather than walls for dividers.





The building is considered an ornament itself rather than applying ornamentation to it.



“We work with the core principles of the Prairie style,” Jaskowiak says. “We focus on open floor plans, continuity of materials, harmony of scale and proportion.” From the outside of this house to the inside, it’s hard

not to notice the effort that West Studio put into utilizing Prairie-style ideals.

“To create free-flowing spaces we used an open floor plan. We introduced geometric shapes and ceiling heights for dividers rather than walls,” Jaskowiak says. “When you walk into the house, there are geometric forms that draw you in different directions. It has an open floor plan with varying shapes to create visual separation.”

The diamond ceiling breaks into patterns that are repeated on the floor. “The woodwork on the floor is stained and features a lot of trim and banding details to give illusions of height and separation of spaces,” Jaskowiak adds. “It helps rooms flow together.”

One challenge of this project was creating a partnership with lot size and the scale of the project. “We had to break the house to human size,” Jaskowiak says. “By breaking it into different planes, and breaking up the materials, we were able to accomplish this.”

The garage was one detail that required extra attention to maintain the Prairie theme of the house. “With smaller lots, it’s difficult to keep the garage from dominating. We wanted it to be the furthest element of the house so that it wouldn’t dominate,” Jaskowiak says. “Step-backs were used — breaking the façade into different elements as it steps back. The living room and patio were pulled forward and a flower box drapes over the garage door to downplay the garage.”



The window seats and shelves are examples of the built-in characteristics of this house. These were intended to embody the Prairie philosophy of all elements in the house being one unit.

Geometric shapes such as the diamonds on the ceiling and floor were used to create free-flowing spaces. The shapes draw a guest in different directions in the house.

Built-in characteristics were used throughout the house such as window seats and shelving. “There is an open library that flows out of the building instead of shelves. It’s built on the second floor at the end of the hallway,” Jaskowiak adds. “It relates to Prairie-style philosophy — one unit.”

Even the stained-glass window serves a purpose. The window was placed in the center of the house between the kitchen, family room and dining room. “The stained glass reflects off the floor to guide you through the house.”

When asked what characteristic he’s most proud of, Jaskowiak responds, “Creating a home that is in harmony with itself, and flows together.”



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