# Bungalow Additions

by Doug Walter, AIA

The bungalow was hugely popular during the first third of the twentieth century, when it helped meet the need for good, basic housing. Bungalows predominate in some of the nicest neighborhoods in Denver, and I see a lot of them in my work.

The architect Gustav Stickley called the bungalow "a house reduced to its simplest form." This is both its strongest attribute and its major limitation. A 1,000 square foot, two bedroom home with a 10x12 kitchen was adequate for our grandparents' generation, but by today's standards it's far too small.

## Bungalow Basics

A bungalow is most easily recognized by its broad, low-pitched roof, which gives it a broad-based feeling of solidity. The low eaves create intimacy and human scale, while the gables provide daylight and an opportunity for ornamentation.

Bungalow roofs are always gabled. One popular Arts and Crafts style was to clip the gables with a jerkinhead, also known as a Dutch hip or half hip. This softens the gable considerably, and any addition to a bungalow with this feature would do well to copy it. Another unusual but picturesque bungalow detail was to "roll" the eaves to resemble the thickness and detail of a thatched roof — although these are a pain to reshingle.

Although most bungalows have only one story, they were built to resemble a $1^1/_2$ story home. In a bungalow where the ridge is parallel to the front, there's usually a forward-facing dormer with a decorative window. Where the ridge is at right angles to the front, a similar decorative window appears in the gable end. Larger bungalows used the space beneath the roof for a couple of bedrooms and a bath, but in small homes, the dormer or side-gable windows do nothing but illuminate the insulation and dust. When doing a bungalow attic conversion or second story, we look for a way to make this dormer functional.

## Second Story Additions Don't Always Add Up

Small bungalows are often remodeled by adding a second floor. But unless this is done carefully, the added space comes at the cost of the bungalow's character. We've found that you can add up to two-thirds of the square footage of the main floor onto the second story without much difficulty (see Figure 1). If the addition gets much larger than that, you're in danger of overwhelming the original structure.

Many people, unfortunately, opt for the full wall-to-wall box addition as a way to obtain maximum square footage. The resulting houses tend to look too tall for their lots and tower over their neighbors. Holding back the front even a little would help immensely to soften the shock.

In certain Denver neighborhoods, almost every other bungalow has had its "top popped," with varying degrees of aesthetic success. At their worst, these forms look to me like "gifts from the sky" — the work of space aliens with a bad sense of humor. They violate not

**Figure 1.** With proper massing, the right materials, and careful attention to detail, an attractive but too-small bungalow (above) can be transformed into something much larger, while maintaining its original character (top).

one or two design principles for compatibility, but the whole lot. The illustrations to follow (see Figures 2 and 3) provide a couple of glaring examples, and suggest some better alternatives.

## A Better Way

Our preference is to preserve as much of the original roof as possible, because that's what gives the bungalow so much of its character. We like to hold any addition in from the front or back, so the original roof still reads as it was intended. Since the sides are often gabled, we build all the way out there. If the original roof is high enough, a large cross-gable dormer off the back may provide all the headroom needed to make an attic conversion feasible.

Another, more difficult addition is to take all or part of the front roof to a higher ridge point, before dropping it down toward the back to create more headroom. Done well, this is unrecognizable as an addition. Where nothing but a full second story will provide the needed space, we'll soften its visual impact by breaking it down into smaller pieces — a series of gable or shed dormers.

For a side addition, such as in a garage addition to the back third of the home, it's best to match the main roofline on a lesser scale, using the same pitch, material, and detail. Side additions to bungalows are somewhat rare, simply because most bungalow neighborhoods are fairly tight, with little space between houses.

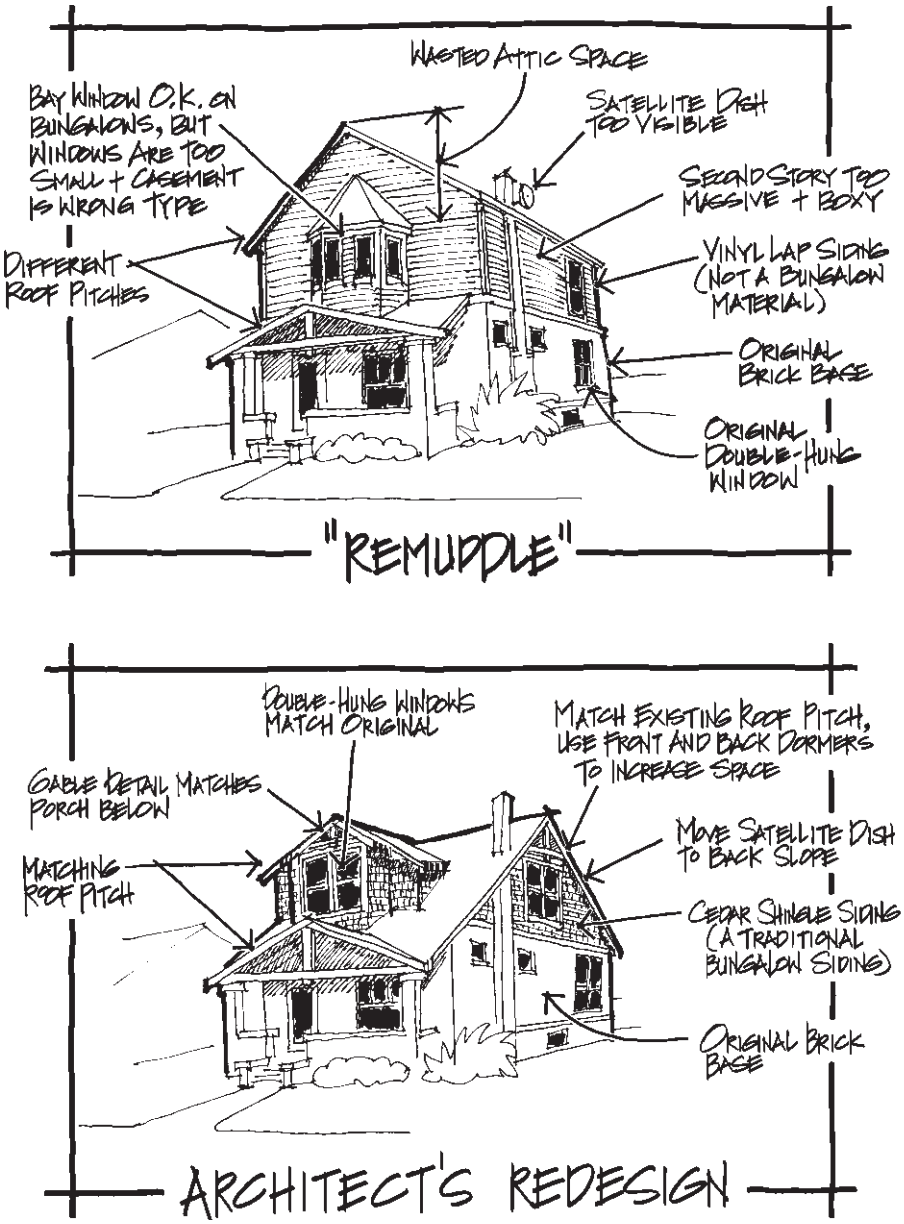


**Figure 2.** In the ill-advised remodel illustrated on top, the front porch provides the only clue to the original structure. Holding an upstairs addition back at the front and sides, as in the improved version, above, helps maintain the feel of the original structure.

## Additions Down Under

The cheapest space you'll ever add to a bungalow is already there, it just needs some work. One great advantage of the bungalow is that it is raised, with the first floor typically five steps or more above grade. As a result, the basement windows look out directly onto the ground, rather than into window wells, as in ranch houses and other more modern styles. Consider adding more daylight and egress function by enlarging those windows downward and adding window wells. This is imperative in basement bedrooms, and a good idea in public areas as well.

Much of the improvement needed in bungalow basements is simply cosmetic, such as boxing in the pipes, furring out peeling walls, and adding drywall, trim, and paint. Low headroom is often an issue, but this is a problem you may want to live with. The cost and complexity of removing a basement floor, buttressing the footings, and dropping a new floor is usually not worth it.

You will get great return from going heavy on the lighting budget down below, to make up for the lack of daylight. A combination of recessed cans for dramatic but unobtrusive light, fluorescents for the utility areas, and decorative Craftsman style reproduction sconces and pendants can make downstairs nicer than upstairs.

## Materials and Details

In the bungalow style, structural details were used as ornament. Rafter tails are usually exposed, often angle-

cut or swallow-tailed for emphasis. Brackets were used freely to hold up broad overhanging eaves, and walls are often punctuated by a belt course at the floor line. The chimney for the living room fireplace is used deliberately for vertical counterpoint to the horizontal mass of the bungalow. Chimneys were often battered — that is, made wider at the bottom than at the top — to give an impression of solidity. The chimney is always flanked by a pair of high windows, like "eyes" to the chimney's "nose."

Great care was taken with the porch columns, which are also large and battered, to visually anchor the home to the ground. When those elephantine porch columns are replaced with something less substantial, like lacy wrought iron, the effect is painfully "wrong."

Bungalows come in all sorts of materials: brick, stone, stucco, siding, or shingle. In Denver, they are usually brick, with stucco or half-timber gable ends and dormers. Any addition should be done with the exact same materials. If you're working with brick, take the time to save what you can during demolition, and look for the rest at a local salvage yard. An alternative would be to do a belt course of the original brick, then to do a stucco and half-timber wall above it.

## Windows and Color

Bungalow windows are usually double-hung, often with mullions in the top sash only. The front living-room window is sometimes a grouping, with two double-hungs flanking a picture window. The small, high windows to either side of the fireplace are commonly fixed, or inswinging casements. Casements really would not be the appropriate choice for replacement windows; I would much rather see new double-hungs without mullions than casements or sliders. In one recent second-story addition, we disguised a casement needed for egress with a horizontal factory mullion that made it look like a double-hung.

Bungalow colors are earthy. Lots of browns, creams, greens, and other muted tones comprise the Craftsman palette, which was designed to blend with natural surroundings. I don't think we'll ever see a book called "Painted Grandmas" filled with clever six-color paint schemes such as we see with Victorians. Bungalows aren't nearly as pretentious or flamboyant as Victorians and don't lend themselves well to bright, clear colors.

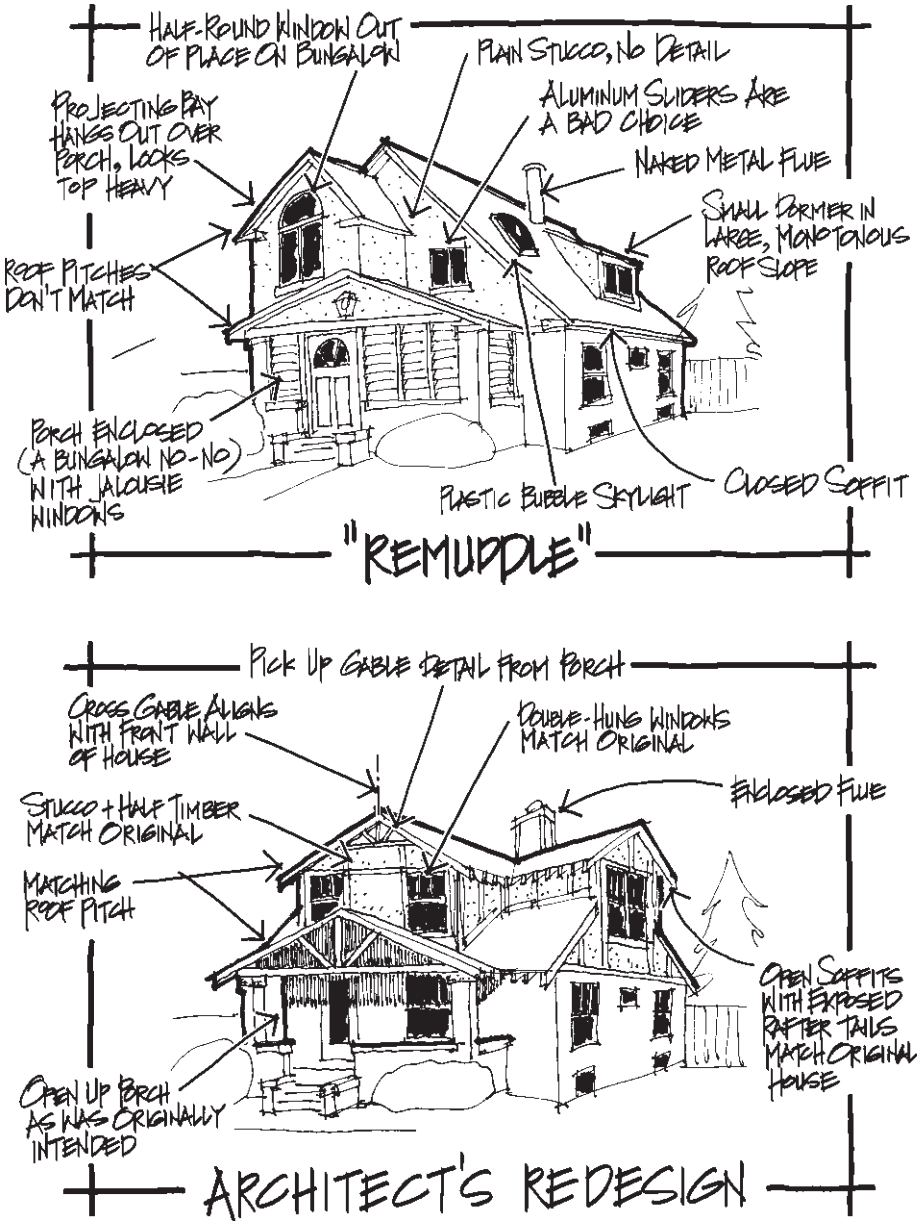


**Figure 3.** Adding too much mass to the upper story of a bungalow leads to an awkward, top-heavy appearance (top). For best results, the added square footage in a pop-top remodel should be no more than two-thirds that of the original first floor. In this case, it would have been better to add the required space with a cross-gable dormer, leaving the original ridge parallel to the front facade (above).

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