# Seamless Additions

by Philip S. Wenz

If you drive around your town looking for the best residential addition, you probably won't find it. That's because a well-designed addition blends so perfectly with the original house that the whole structure looks as if it were built at one time. I call the result a "seamless addition."

Seamless design seldom happens by accident. Pulling it off depends largely on a number of basic design concepts, of which the most important are massing, articulation, rhythm, scale, and proportion. Experienced architects and designers consciously use all of these elements to pull the parts of a building together.

## What Is Massing, Anyway?

When an architect refers to massing, he or she means the gross shape of a building, as defined by its primary forms such as roofs, porches, and wings. In most houses, the principal massing element is the roof. Roofs are often highly visible from a distance, and are frequently associated with particular styles of architecture, such as French mansard, Dutch hip, or American ranch. In a well-designed house, other elements of the building, such as siding and trim, will be compatible with the roof's period and origin. Good addition design normally begins by matching the pitch and style of the new roof to that of the existing roof.

In the top sketch of the illustration on the following page, for example, a well-thought-out roof configuration enables this second-story backyard addition to blend with the original house. The identically pitched hip roofs give the impression of unity that would have been conspicuously absent if another roof form had been chosen.

The next most important massing element is the body of the building. If a building's body is long and low, a long, low addition will usually work best. That may mean that a new wing is the best addition to a long, low ranch house. If that's not an option — as in the case here, where a long, narrow lot dictated a second-story addition — the new second story should still reflect the basic shape of the house. Don't make the addition square and boxlike if the house is long and rectangular.

## Break It Up

Articulation, in architecture, means breaking up masses, as well as secondary surfaces — such as the planes of walls and roofs — so they don't appear monotonous or overbearing. The large, continuous surface of a multi-story wall, for example, can be broken up with indentations, bay windows, or balconies. Further articulation can be achieved by treating individual wall surfaces with wide window and door trim or interesting shingle or siding patterns.

Articulation elements of the existing house should be reflected in the addition. If a large roof plane has been articulated with dormers, for example, similar dormers can be used to articulate the dormer roof as well, while visually connecting the old and the new.

## Rhythm, Scale, and Proportion

All parts of a well-designed building — from massing elements such as roofs and porches to trim, columns, railings, and other decorative features — must also make effective use of rhythm, scale, and proportion.

Rhythm refers to the pattern with which building elements are repeated. Unless it is handled carefully, for example, a single bay window on one side of a front facade can make a house look lopsided. Two, or even three bays arranged rhythmically across the front can give a feeling of solidity.

Several rhythmic elements have been used to create visual interest and continuity in the side elevation on page 26. Horizontal windows, balanced in size, impart a sense of stability. Vertical rhythm is provided by progressively higher roof lines from front to back and by the stacked windows.

Too much reliance on rhythm, however, can be monotonous. Rhythmic elements do not have to be exact repetitions of one another, all evenly spaced. A series of roofs of different size but having the same pitch and trim can provide vertical rhythm as they increase in size from the porch to the second story. Similarly, posts and columns don't have to be absolutely symmetrical to establish an effective rhythm. So long as the viewer gets the sense that these elements are pulling the house together — not stuck on randomly — the arrangement can be playfully varied by the designer.

Scale and proportion, finally, have to do with the spatial relationship between the old and the new. The apparent size of an appropriately scaled addition should mesh with that of the original house. If the addition is bigger than the house, for example, you might use articulating elements to break up its mass so it doesn't overwhelm the original structure. Proportion, as used here, means making the new masses conform to the existing as much as possible. Long and low, short and squat — your design is more likely to succeed if you let birds of a feather flock together.

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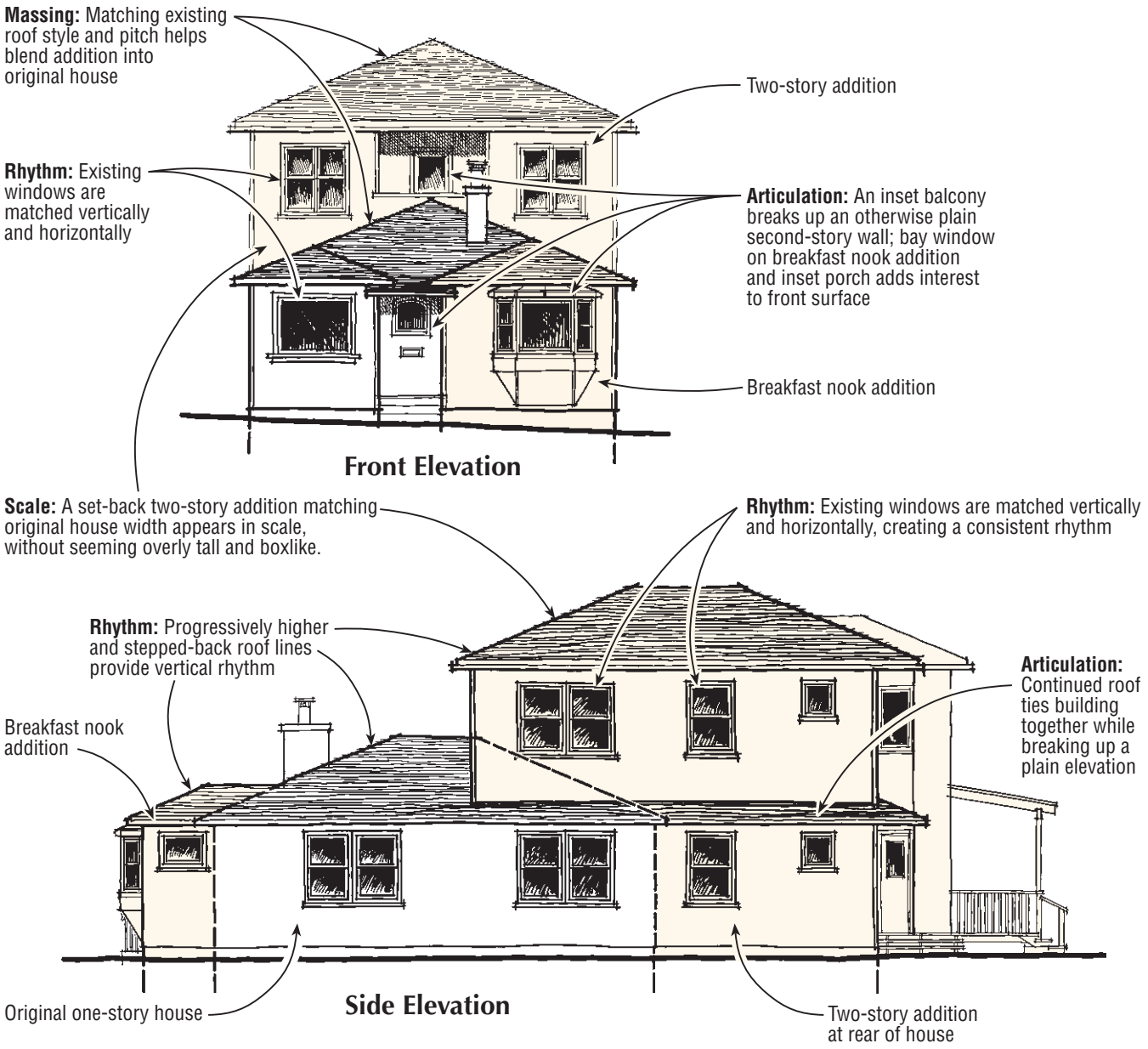
*See illustration on next page*

# Massing, Rhythm, and Scale




As seen from the front, the large two-story addition appears in scale with the original one-story structure. Its position behind the original facade prevents it from seeming overly tall and boxlike (top). The hip roof matches that of the original one-story house, providing an effective visual connection between the two (bottom). The existing windows are matched vertically and horizontally, creating a consistent rhythm.