



# HISTORY IN THE MAKING

CHARLIE & CO. DESIGN IMBUES HOMES WITH LEGACY.

BY MARGUERITE HAPPE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SPACECRAFTING AND COREY GAFFNER

*The historic identity of St. Paul's Crocus Hill neighborhood* remains unparalleled in the Twin Cities. Few understand this extraordinary legacy more intimately than Charlie Simmons, founder and principal at Charlie & Co. Design, Ltd. "I was born and raised in St. Paul," he explains. "Starting at the age of 10, I would sit in my room and sketch the city's classic homes." Today, as part of the area's premier architecture firm for urban infill residences, Simmons continues to draw historic homes alongside co-principal Colby Mattson, hybridizing enduring respect for historical precedence with modern-day sensibilities.

In recent years, they have oft been called upon to bring their expertise to one of the metro's oldest neighborhoods. "For our Crocus Hill projects, we are mindful in creating homes that work within their surroundings but also have their own identity," explains Simmons.

As part of the design process, the firm first surveys adjacent properties to ensure an abode's exterior aesthetic will blend seamlessly into its setting. "In our modern Tudor project, for example, we saw the beautiful Tudor to the east," he notes. "So we built a home that is an appropriate stylistic companion while still fulfilling the needs of today's family." Nuanced evolutions modernize the house's appearance: A high-contrast light stucco with black trim supplants the more traditional color palette, while a dramatized, swooping arch takes the place of a classic Tudor entryway.

"Inside, we asked ourselves how people would have cooked 500 years ago in Northern England," Simmons says. "We took the concept of a Tudor hearth and modernized it to create a distinct kitchen that retains its historic DNA." The final product? A residence deferent to the fabric of the neighborhood with a luminous, spacious interior.

While the firm actively works to deliver architecturally appropriate value, it also adjusts detailing to meet the practical needs of modern-day living. "Historically, homes had smaller, separated rooms with detached garages," Mattson explains. "So in a recent Craftsman-style project, we created a very thin link between the house and the garage so that it would appear as if the house was detached without actually being so."

That particular job also required honoring the property's placement at the informal entrance to the neighborhood. "The clients' priority was to ensure that the home could function as a gatekeeper for the residents and that it looked as if it had always been here," notes Mattson.

Despite the team's delight in creating thoroughly researched, painstakingly produced nods to architectural history, both Mattson and Simmons remain steadfast in their duty to articulate the stylistic voice of their individual clients. "The variety of our homes reflects the variety of our clients," says Mattson. "No matter what, when a project is finished, it will reflect their personality." ●