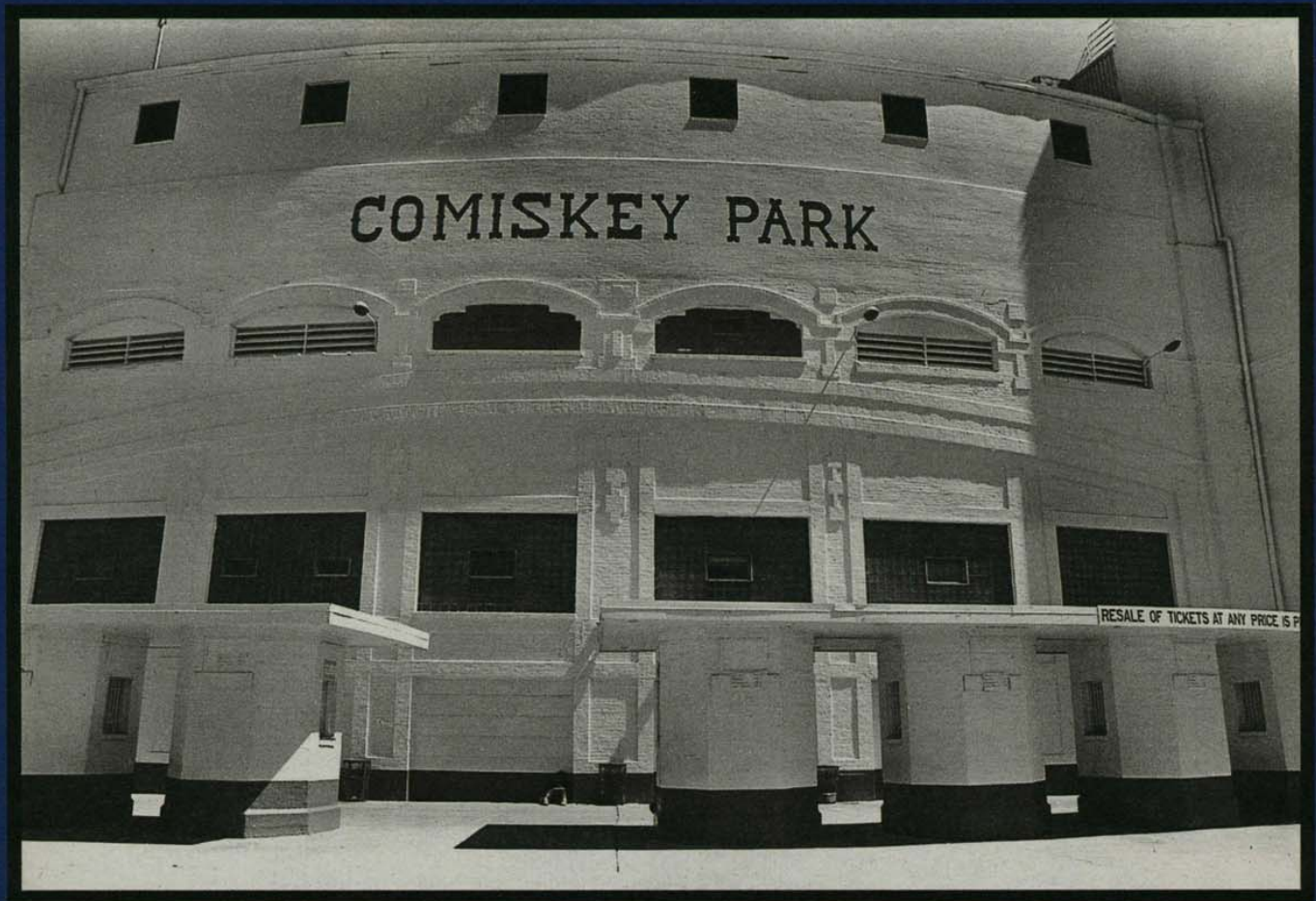


# Chicago Tribune Magazine

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## The last summer

**The final season in the sun  
for America's  
oldest  
ballpark**

PLUS: A short story by Joyce Carol Oates

Design

# In character

Keeping the flavor but eliminating the flaws of an old house

BY ELAINE MARKOUTSAS  
PHOTOS BY TONY BERARDI

The goals of the architect and the interior designer were mutual: How to update a home that's eightysomething, to elevate it above dowdiness while retaining some of its early charms.

"Its interiors were kind of dark and dingy," says architect Richard Gibbons of the Prairie-style north-suburban home that dates to about 1910. "The problem was to create an open floor plan and still preserve the feeling of rooms."

At the same time, interior designer Harriet Robinson realized her challenge: "If the house were furnished in the style in which it was built, it could be very ponderous. We decided to use classic, modern furniture with accent pieces from the period."

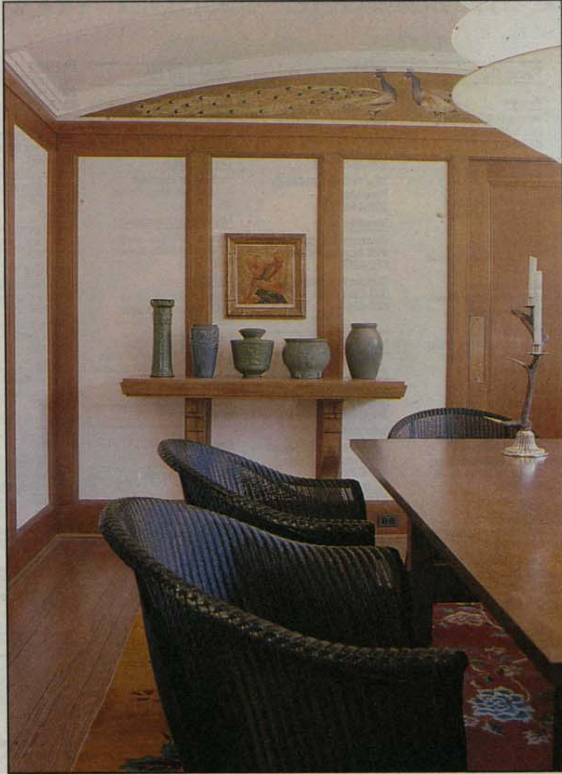
For the architectural updating, Gibbons simply took his cues from the original design. "The house had a lot of character and clues to work from," he says. "We worked within the existing framework and rearranged some rooms, maintaining a traditional layout."

Missing moldings were restored. "High baseboards were continued to make the house feel more substantial," Gibbons says. When windows were added, care also was taken to match brick, woodwork and mullions. French doors were installed to faithfully reproduce the originals.

Gibbons borrowed from the design of the walnut mantel in the living room to create a "buffet," a shelf cantilevered off the wall in the dining room. Made of pine, the piece was stained to match the original wood.

The most significant change was eliminating some walls and

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Above: The simplicity of the dining room heightens its drama.



A game table and chairs well suit the wood-and-brick architectural setting on the porch.





adding windows. "Before, it was very claustrophobic," Gibbons says. "The trick was to get light coming in from a lot of different angles."

The living room was opened and a family room created out of a small guest room. French doors lead from the family room to a back yard on a bluff. "We were interested in creating vistas," Gibbons says. "So now the house flows right out into the yard."

To visually separate the spaces, Gibbons framed the rooms with columns. (A colonnade also was continued off the back wall of the building.) "The homeowner didn't want any demarcation," the architect says, "but we felt it would be out of character to not have some-

**A contrasting bullnose border was added to the kitchen countertops to add visual interest. A fixed French door panel was designed to echo original doors throughout.**

thing."

Maintaining character was also Robinson's concern. "The house is very strong, very masculine-looking. Lovely, pale colors would never work. The background is strong colors, strong lines. You couldn't put in carved French furniture. You have to be faithful to the architecture."

In the living room Robinson combined tailored sofas upholstered in woven cotton with a glass-topped table with bronze legs and an English turn-of-the-century wooden chair that has a tooled-leather seat. In the front window are a pair of contemporary red-leather chairs and a Stickley-style table.

Another Stickley-style table was crafted for the dining room by Chicagoan Scott Chambers and teamed with copies of Lloyd Loom chairs (this interpretation is made of metal). A fixture of paper from Germany offers a sculptural solution to lighting.

"Our main concern," Gibbons says, "was to emphasize existing strong design elements and to add them where they were missing, resulting in an open-flow house that is good for entertaining as well as living." ■

**A vibrant Chinese Art Deco rug brings color into the living room and inspires accents throughout the house.**

#### WHERE TO BUY

**Living room:** Sofa fabricated by Mike Bell; fabric from Jack Lenor Larsen; antique aubusson pillow (on sofa) from The Royal Peacock, Winnetka; cocktail table from Brickel Associates; Art Deco sconces from 3434; red leather chairs from AI (Atelier International).

**Porch:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh table and chairs from AI.

**Dining room:** Table crafted by Scott Chambers through James Mall; Arts and Crafts pottery and parrot painting from 3434.