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Home of the Month: Open for living

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The interior retains the open plan of the former grocery. To the back, the porch was removed and the yard was leveled. The front corner entrance was mirrored on the back facade.

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"There's no way I would buy that!" Dan Lilley said when he first saw the Nordon Grocery & Mart. John Reese, Lilley's partner, agreed, even though they were looking for a property that was out of the ordinary.

But by the time the 1917 building in the Glenwood-Brooklyn neighborhood came on the market their opinion had changed. Reese, an architect, imagined the store's structure, free of load-bearing walls, as the ample, open living space the couple longed for.

The transformation came with plenty of challenges. The building had to be raised off the ground to pour in footings; until then, the foundation sat on dirt. The long-gone corner entrance needed to be restored as well as the façade's simple lines. And to stay within budget, Reese made clever use of simple materials as well as off-the-shelf and recycled products.



To retain the open plan and spirit of the former grocery store, in the first floor Reese opted for less traditional solutions to define the areas. The living area and hearth sit on two floating platforms and a low concrete-block wall obscures the direct view to the kitchen space, suggesting the presence of a penny-candy counter.

The upstairs is given over to private spaces - four bedrooms, one used as a home office and another as a "listening room," and two full bathrooms. Though walls separate the rooms, by aligning exterior and interior windows, natural light floods every space.

The outdoors is also exquisitely designed. To one side of the building, a koi pond and deck make up an intimate outdoor room. To the other side, a leveled yard serves as an extension of the interior social spaces. At night, light filters through the thick plastic pane of the shed, a small structure designed to transform itself into a huge garden lantern.

The Nordon Grocery & Mart is proof that recycling and repurposing structures on budget can produce wonderful spaces.

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