

RENEWED AND IMPROVED



IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT A HOMEOWNER APPROACHES an architect whom they're considering retaining to design a renovation/addition and says, "We love our house." Usually a homeowner leads with the aspect of their house that is wanting. But for Piper and Chris Underwood, they had fallen in love with their 1950s-era house in Del Mar, Calif., 10 years earlier. "It touched me in its simplicity and modesty," says Piper, who was particularly enamored with the private rear yard punctuated at the end by a huge pine tree. But, in the intervening years, their two boys were becoming teenagers and the narrow shared living areas and dubious wiring and plumbing were in need of improvement. The challenge for architect Nick Noyes would be to address the shortcomings without compromising the existing cottage's character. Piper and Chris wanted more breathing room, but they didn't want to expand into the rear yard they loved.

Informal...
but impressive
enough when it
needs to be.

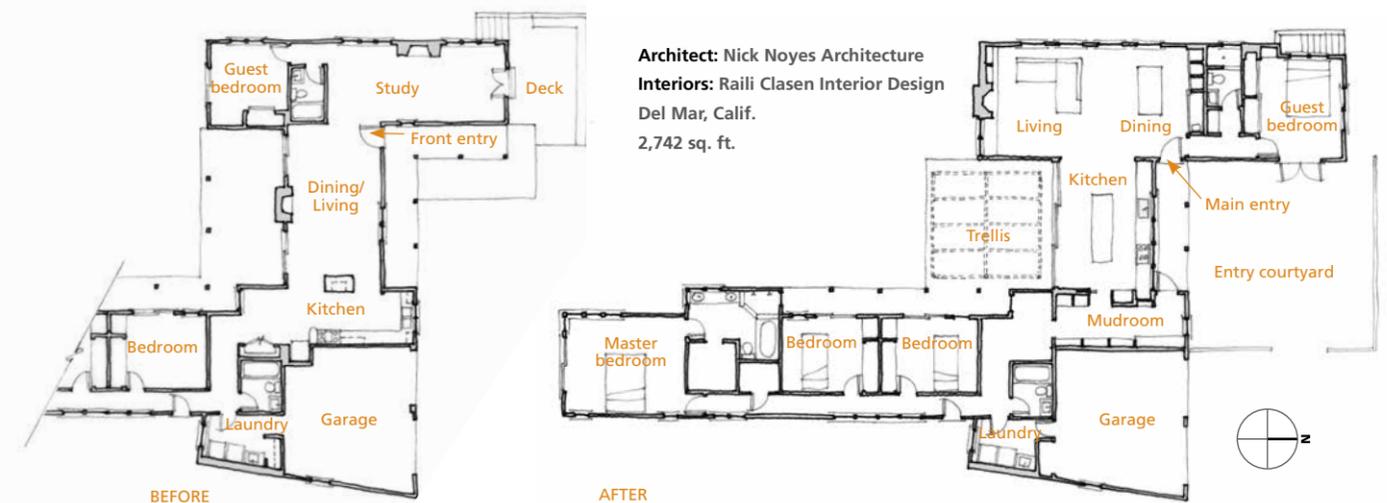


A humble fence, painted the same rusty red as the board-and-batten cottage, defines a front courtyard composed of economical, concrete stepping-stones and gravel strips.

Straight ahead, the butter-colored paneled porch wall, beneath the sheltering Galvalume roof, is differentiated enough from the board-and-batten to announce the entry.



The new guest room has its own entrance (flanked by cottage bee blossom) off the front courtyard, which provides both additional privacy and informal outdoor living space. Even though this western wing was widened and had its ridge raised, it still expresses human scale within simple massing.





The dining area, right off the new entrance, sits beneath the sheltering roof's painted, exposed framing and rod ties. A new bar features accent black cabinets and a black-and-white photo mural of an old truck from Chris's family wine and spirits distribution business, which dates back to 1875. A simple, white, painted-board barn slider closes off the bar when not in use.

Nick observed that the cottage should better connect with the rear and front yards—to the south and north, respectively—to maximize outdoor living while maintaining privacy. He also aimed to improve flow between the primary living spaces of the kitchen, dining, and living areas so the cottage would work better on a daily basis for the family of four as well as when the family entertains larger groups. He and the owners agreed that the bedroom wing, which they believed to be a somewhat newer addition, would need little changed other than some new finishes.

Because the original cottage's simple massing and human scale were among its charms, Nick was careful to discreetly incorporate more floor area and volume. He widened the western wing that runs north-south just enough to absorb the width of a former entry porch and lengthened it in the

direction of a former deck to the north, while also raising the ridge a modest 18 in. or so. The result added approximately 300 sq. ft. and subtly increased the volume of that wing, all while maintaining the simple massing and human scale. The new, exposed sheltering roof framing and painted-steel tie rods add rhythm and texture. New eaves mimic the existing overhanging crafted rafter-tail details, and new siding mimics the original redwood no-nonsense board-and-batten finish. The increased width and length of that wing in combination with the taller cathedral ceiling there now accommodates a relocated dining/living area to the south (anchored by a new fireplace) and a new guest room and full bath to the north. (Before the renovation, the south end of that wing contained a smaller guest room and full bath, which blocked daylight and view of the more private rear yard from the living area.)

Memories of a raised concrete hearth in Piper's childhood home inspired the design of a similar hearth in the living area, which relates to the new board-formed concrete Rumford fireplace there. The main entry now opens directly into the new dining/living area approached from a shallow porch off the new protected entry court.

Because the kitchen is often the center of attention at a gathering, and even when not entertaining, it was moved into the center of the house to be part of the action. Previously, it had been tucked in a small ell against the garage wall to the east. It now occupies the space between the new front entry

court—seen through new kitchen windows to the north—and the reimagined back patio to the south, accessed via oversized sliders in a wall that had once been partially interrupted by a daylight- and view-blocking fireplace. The large and informal galley kitchen is open to the dining/living area, but its relationship, perpendicular to it through a cased opening, offers it some separation as well. The new location floods the cooking area with daylight and connects it to outdoor living in front and back, which allows this small house to live a little larger. A mudroom and pantry now take the place of the former kitchen.

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The living area, beyond the open dining area, includes a new utilitarian yet sophisticated board-formed, concrete Rumford fireplace and plenty of space for the family, which makes it one of Piper's favorite places in the cottage.



The raised hearth of the reading nook not only provides cozy additional seating but also positions the fireplace at eye level when family and guests are seated. The window

seat, partially beneath an intimate soffit, complements the volume of the cathedral ceiling in the living space it borders.



Nick opened the kitchen wing to the front entry courtyard via a run of square Marvin windows above the counter to the north and to the rear yard via oversized Weiland glass

sliders to the south. This allows the interior to borrow space and daylight from the outdoors and for the interior to expand outdoors.



The efficient galley kitchen includes rift-sawn, white-oak custom cabinets with a stain that blends well with the engineered white-oak flooring, which warms the mostly white palette running through the kitchen and dining/living wings. The view from the kitchen sink wall extends across the front porch and into the entry court, which acts as a buffer to the street.



Because the kitchen wing is perpendicular to the dining/living wing, which is accessed through a large cased opening, it's both part of the dining/living area and somewhat distinct from it. The cohesive palette helps unify the perpendicular spaces. The kitchen also benefits from a sheltering roof and brass hardware, which will acquire an appealing patina.



The new pantry/mudroom occupies the former kitchen. The floor is the original durable concrete with a new thinset finish, and the ceiling is flat and lower to suit the utilitarian space. The black mudroom bench and tall pantry storage cabinetry along with the black peg rail and black-and-white checkerboard wallpaper introduce playful black accents, which also appear in the bar area and elsewhere.



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Interior designer Raili Clasen joined the team to help with interior finishes and furnishings. Nick established the consistent and economic backdrop of mostly white interior walls, ceilings, and trim, and worked with Raili and the owners to create some feature moments. They all agreed that oak accents in the form of the engineered prefinished oak flooring in the kitchen and living/dining areas and rift-sawn, white-oak cabinetry with a stain in the kitchen and the desk built-in (behind barn sliders off the new guest room) would warm those spaces and also help unify them. They opted for brass fixtures in the kitchen and brass hardware on the doors and kitchen cabinets to similarly add warmth while introducing a pleasing wabi sabi patina and substantial feel. Raili proposed the black cabinetry accents in the bar behind the barn sliders off the dining area and in the pantry/mudroom as well

as the black-and-white wallpaper in those locations, which act as bookends of sorts to the kitchen. Black details in the rugs, pillows, and guest room linens weave the sophisticated yet playful look into the soft finishes, too.

After the project was complete, Nick was pleased to hear Piper report that Chris said that he could stay there forever. Although much of the cottage is essentially new now, it's still familiar enough to evoke the essence of the cottage that originally attracted Piper. "Our house doesn't feel large when it's just the four of us; it still feels cozy; but when we have larger groups, everyone has a place to sit," says Piper. "It's a very informal house, but it's impressive enough when it needs to be," notes Nick of the cottage he shaped for how the Underwoods live today.



Just outside the kitchen sliders, a willow-covered, lightweight, galvanized steel arbor designed by Nick provides informal, shaded shelter for outdoor seating, overlooking the backyard and large pine that won Piper's heart from the outset.