



perfect fit

A growing family overcomes the restrictions of a long and narrow site to build this cheery seaside house.

THIS PHOTO | Hidden behind the checkerboard wall in the entryway is a deep storage closet.

OPPOSITE | Despite being a seashell's throw from the Pacific Ocean, the Rowlands wanted a New England feel for their home. They included a gabled roof, shingle siding, and a front dormer.



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Duncan and Kathy Rowland couldn't get excited about renovating their older home in a crowded urban setting. So when they discovered a long, narrow lot for sale just three blocks from the water's edge in Manhattan Beach, California, they snatched it up.

"You never know what you're going to run into with a renovation," Kathy says. "So we decided to build new and get exactly what we wanted."

The Rowlands, originally from the East Coast, wanted a New England-style seaside home with plenty of room for their family of five. At the same time, they didn't want the house to tower above the compact neighborhood. So architect Michael Lee designed the 4,000-square-foot Cape Cod-style house to have a modest, restrained appearance. No SoCal glitz here.

"Though they wanted the benefits of a three-story house, they didn't want it to look that way from the street," Lee says, "so the third level is set back considerably from the front."

Kathy also wanted each room to have its own identity. In response, Lee created a series of discrete spaces for the living room, dining room, family room, and kitchen by shifting floor levels up and down and adding half-walls and columns that subtly divide and define the spaces without compromising the home's openness.

Upon entering the front door, visitors are greeted with an open, light-filled stair tower that ascends three floors, with balconies and generous landings at each level. The entry's checkerboard-pattern molding wall previews the fine woodwork seen throughout the house.

DESIGNidea

French doors aren't typically used for a modest living room. But here they welcome the wispy breezes off the ocean. *C'est magnifique!*

The living room functions as a comfortable and serene adult refuge, which the kids usually choose to pass through as they make their way to the family room TV. To set an interior boundary, the living room is separated from other rooms by a half-wall. The short wall encourages conversation between rooms and sets a backdrop for a sofa.



“Because this is a long, skinny house, the interlocking spaces are **Very** important. There are almost no hallways.”

—architect Michael Lee



Just off the entry, a few steps descend into a comfortable, inviting living room, which is separated from the dining area by a half-wall dressed in more molding. At its lower level, the living room offers coziness and a sense that this room is somewhat isolated from the adjacent dining room.

A double-height ceiling in the family room adds to the feeling of airiness, and a kids' play area on the second floor allows a view down into the room. The built-in media wall—with a flat-panel TV, space-efficient bookcases, and cupboards—faces the open, bright kitchen. The three Rowland kids often do their homework at the island, which has been designed to resemble a piece of furniture with spindle legs and detailed woodwork.

When the parents are seeking privacy, their obvious choice is the second-floor master bedroom. This compact refuge features high ceilings, a slate-clad fireplace, and a roofline that pitches dramatically, adding light-filled height to the space. A small balcony looks onto the street.

LEFT | The position of the dining room chandelier was carefully thought out during the planning phase. Had this detail been overlooked, the fixture might have blocked the travel lane.

ABOVE | A built-in hutch under the stairs efficiently utilizes space in the dining room. It's a formal touch amid informality.





THIS PHOTO | A double-height ceiling adds volume in the family room, and a large window on the second level provides extra natural light without compromising the storage benefits of the media wall. **ABOVE RIGHT** | The kitchen island countertop is made of walnut—the same wood species seen on floors throughout main-level rooms.



Design Tips for a Tight Lot

From the Rowland house and other homes where lots are constricted, architect Michael Lee has learned to follow these design principles.

- **Design an open space.** With a long, skinny house on a narrow lot, interlocking spaces are important, Lee says. "There are almost no hallways in the Rowland house, so exposing all of the circulation paths to other rooms is a big part of the design," he says.
- **Make selective use of volume.** "As far as the square-footage costs, it's expensive to add volume," Lee says. "You can't have volume everywhere." A key area is the family room because it's the center of the house.
- **Pay attention to window placement.** The house has only a 3-foot setback from the property line, so balancing light, privacy, and other practical matters was critical. Windows high on walls with close neighbors invite plenty of streaming light. On the kitchen wall, the windows were scaled down to allow for storage.
- **Use space efficiently.** The dining room hutch under the stairs, the media wall, and the master bedroom bureau are all examples of efficient built-ins. In the kitchen, an island does double duty, providing bar seating as well as a hideaway for appliances. And a large closet tucked under the stairs in the entry makes for a storage gem.

A recreation room that opens to a roof deck occupies the third level. Because the lot is so tight, that roof deck and the front patio are the primary outdoor spaces.

"The house definitely fulfilled our needs," Kathy says. "It turned out just how we wanted it to." *

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About this Home

SQUARE FEET: 4,000
BEDROOMS: 5
BATHROOMS: 3 full,
 1 half

FOOTPRINT: 25x60 feet
LOCATION: Manhattan Beach,
 California
EST. COST: NA

- 1 Open plan.** The main level is one large space. There is a bare minimum of walls as the living room, dining room, family room, and kitchen flow into one another.
- 2 Parent-friendly.** The second-level plan isolates the parents' suite at one end of the floor and groups three kids' rooms with a bath at the other end.
- 3 Quick clean.** A laundry room positioned close to the kids' rooms minimizes toting dirty clothes around.



OPPOSITE | In the master bedroom, the steep roofline and small balcony add a sense of roominess. A slate-clad fireplace and reading chaise complete the peaceful retreat.

ABOVE | The fireplace wall of the master bedroom has a built-in cabinet, which was given traditional-style drawer fronts and false feet so it would look more like furniture.

