



Broad eaves above the new porch are repeated in the upper roof lines, giving the house a horizontal Craftsman look. The tower's small square windows act as skylights for an upstairs bathroom.

Making It Family-Size

A California couple transforms their beloved cottage into a spirited home for a family of four, with the help of savvy professionals.

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It was 1991, and newlyweds Nora and Neal Gervais knew exactly what they needed from their first house: dog potential, party potential, and hoop potential. They love dogs, have large extended families, and, well, a guy has to have his basketball hoop. The quaint 1919 cottage-style house they found in El Segundo, California, had all that.

Seven years, two dogs, and one daughter (with another on the way) later, the 1,500-square-foot bungalow was cramped. The house also suffered from poor ventilation, little natural light, and meager insulation. It was time to expand. "I pictured a house that used up every square foot of the property," says Nora.

The couple found an understanding architect and an enthusiastic contractor in Michael Lee. Without changing the original footprint, Lee added a second story and moved the family bedrooms upstairs. A guest bedroom and bath remain downstairs. On the first floor, he opened up a warren of small rooms and >> on 38



Larger living room windows (above) were installed to bring in more views and natural light. Replacing interior walls with structural pillars (left) opens up the first floor. Space under the stairs became a coat closet.

The Challenge

Increase living space of the 1919 California bungalow, working with a budget and without changing its original footprint.

BEFORE - FIRST FLOOR



The Solution

Walls were removed; structural pillars and half-walls define first-floor spaces. A second floor was added with bedrooms. "The second story features a central tower oriented on a rotated axis," explains architect Michael Lee. "It literally gives the old house a new twist." It's sited to take advantage of the morning sun.

AFTER - FIRST FLOOR



AFTER - SECOND FLOOR





A half-wall separating the dining area from the living room defines space and allows more light in. New French doors open to the wrap-around porch, so the living space easily extends outdoors.

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erased the remnants of a 1970s remodeling by removing the old kitchen, one bedroom, and a bath to create the new kitchen and a wide stairwell. Lee removed partition walls between the living room and dining room and replaced them with half-walls. He did the same with a wall between a banquette in the kitchen and step-down family room.

Not only did Lee craft an expansive interior, he also transformed the exterior. Although the update went beyond the family's original budget, Lee >> on 40

“The goal was to increase the home's livability for a growing family by opening up the maze of little rooms.” ARCHITECT MICHAEL LEE



Low walls cornering the breakfast nook (above) allow views throughout the house. The cozy banquette has storage underneath for small electrics. The kitchen nook (left) houses a work station with areas for recipes, mail, and school notices. Dead-end space became a pantry with pocket door for the widest opening.

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convinced them to add a front porch. Nora now says, "It's probably the one thing we love the most."

Contractor Ronnie Flavens also played a part in the project. Inspired by the couple's enthusiasm and the overall style of architecture, he opted to do much of the woodworking. "This house is a collage of several styles that actually works," says Flavens. "I call it a Prairie design with a modern flair."

In the end, it was the collaboration of like minds that brought the old home's character back into the new house. "When my mom walked in, she said, 'Oh Nora, this looks just like my grandmother's house.' And that was exactly what I was looking for—with a twist."

So the Gervaises can check off dog potential (Crash and Rockney feel right at home) and party potential (plenty of open space to entertain), but what about hoop potential? Says Neal, "The basketball court is at the park. That's just a quick jog down the hill." 🐾

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