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Magazine
Summer 2009

SUSTAINABILITY AND
STYLE
IN PALO ALTO
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Sustainability and style

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A country cottage, revisited

Preserving the charm while modernizing for today | Page 8

Clean lines, simple color palette

Couple transforms cottage to custom family house | Page 14

From stark to welcoming

A warmer color palette greets visitors in Palo Alto | Page 18

Petscaping your home

Well beyond basic fencing needs | Page 21

On the cover: The deck extends the public spaces from the great room outdoors at CityLofts in downtown Palo Alto. **Photo by Dasja Dolan.**

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With ceilings soaring to 14 feet in the great rooms, CityLofts are filled with light in the public spaces. The height is broken up by changes in texture and lines.

by Carol Blitzer / photos by Dasja Dolan

Walking down shady Forest Avenue in downtown Palo Alto, one can't help but notice the modern new CityLofts — four urban live/work units nestled among apartment buildings and tall trees.

Architect David Solnick, who also chairs the Architectural Review Board, created flexible spaces for today's world, incorporating eco-friendly materials.

The site had its own challenges — a long, narrow strip of land, surrounded by multi-story apartments and parking lots. So, Solnick broke up the spaces, from the contrasting permeable pavers and aggregate driveway to the fence designed with varying-width boards and projecting posts. Metal trellises and balconies, as well as contrasting stucco, wood, metal and glass, break up the vertical ascent.

On ground level, each unit contains a garage and a room (complete with sink, small refrigerator and microwave) that could function as an office, exercise space, rec

room, theater or guest or nanny's space. Pop into the elevator or take the stairs to the middle level, with its three bedrooms and two baths. Continue up a floor to the public areas — a great room that spills onto a large deck.

Design emphasis was definitely on the public parts of the home, Solnick says, which were placed on the third floor — somewhat counter-intuitively.

"To give it a gracious, expansive feel, it had to be on the top floor," he says — plus that allowed a loft ceiling that reaches 14 feet. "We like our main areas to soar, to fly," he adds.

With light streaming in from windows on all sides, the next challenge was controlling that light. After the building was framed, Solnick and interior designer Jennifer Hale walked through and determined which windows would remain clear, and which would be sandblasted or ribbed. "We customize while standing in the space," he says.

Further sandblasting to create

SUSTAINABILITY AND STYLE

Condos offer modern living, walkable to downtown



Eco-friendly materials range from the glass tiles in the kitchen backsplash and composite countertop to the cork and bamboo flooring.

with a built-in vacuum and trash compactor added to minimize trips up and down the stairs.

Hale calls the deck off the great room “the most used room in the house.” It includes a water spout, for easy watering of plants, and a gas connection for an outdoor kitchen/barbecue. Furniture is covered in Sunbrella™ fabric cushions, created to withstand weather changes.

The second floor contains the bedrooms, as well as a laundry nook. The master bedroom suite boasts a large, walk-in closet and a sitting alcove, as well as a large bathroom designed for people to age in place. Besides the tub, there’s a separate shower with a hand-held sprayer and a place to sit.

Solnick points to the contrasting textures — from the limestone tile floor to the CaesarStone countertop and porcelain tile backsplash — that “make it more approachable and friendly.” The sink is semi-recessed, set back to the wall. “It should be beautiful but also easy to care for,” Hale adds.

Solnick designed a loft in one of the bedrooms, complete with cork floor and windows, which can serve as a storage area or sleeping space for a child (with a rail and ladder added).

continued on next page



Privacy is provided by discrete placement of windows in both the kitchen and master bedroom, ‘obscuring’ glass to focus attention on the trees.

“obscure” glass was done in the kitchen, forcing the eye up to the trees, rather than into one’s neighbor’s spaces. “It really frames the view,” Hale says.

Hale began her work long before the building was complete, “trying to highlight the beautiful architectural details,” she says. She chose earth tones that most people would be comfortable with, “but the patterns are not boring,” she adds.

She’s responsible for choosing the many linear details that repeat throughout the home: taupe/gray mini-subway tiles in the kitchen backsplash, a gray porcelain tile on the floor in the great room that’s been custom cut to break up the square grid and lead the eye outside.

Materials were chosen for their environmental worthiness, as well as their design and function. Floors are either bamboo, cork, or ceramic or composite tile, with radiant heating coming from a high-efficiency boiler in the garage. Kitchen cabinets are made of an engineered veneer, made from wood scraps (so no large trees are impacted).

Lighting exaggerates the height of the ceiling and adds drama, Solnick says.

Wall colors subtly change from floor to floor and space to space. “You’d lose detail if it was one solid color,” Hale says.

Kitchen storage is maximized in the large island, behind metal stools. Appliances and details were chosen for both form and function,

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continued from previous page

In the middle bedroom, open space above the closet could be used to store tents, or to display art objects, Solnick says.

Soffits are a key design element in CityLofts, Solnick adds, because they “visually break up tall walls. ... Particularly at night, people want more intimacy.”

“We try to create spaces where you walk in, worries leave, (and you) feel, “This is where I want to be,” Hale adds. **h+g**

Resources:

Architect: David Solnick, 212 High St., Palo Alto; 650-328-8065; www.davidsolnick.com

Interior designer: Jennifer Hale, allied member ASID, Palo Alto; 650-722-9883; www.interiorsformodernliving.com

Goal of project:

Create four flexible, eco-friendly live/work spaces on a long, skinny lot

Year built:

2009

Size of home, lot:

2,676 sq ft on 2,570-sq-ft lot

List price:

\$2.66 million (Unit B or C)

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Phase I of the remodel brought a carport at street level, leading to the small 1930s cottage (left). Walls came down between kitchen, dining room and living room and a truss-and-beam ceiling added.



The upper reaches of Woodside is part of a popular cycling circuit, the challenging steep hills a hard ride but shaded by majestic redwoods. Joel knew the area as part of his cycling route, but had no idea there were whole neighborhoods tucked behind the main roads.

So he was surprised when he and his partner, Tim, happened upon a 1930s cottage nestled in a community of winding lanes just off Skyline Boulevard. Only miles from the suburban developments of Silicon Valley, but

A country cottage, revisited

by Sharon Driscoll / photos by Dasja Dolan
within easy commuting distance to their employers, the quaint setting spoke to them and they decided to make it their home.

They bought the small cottage in 2003 knowing it would require a

Preserving the charm while modernizing for today's living

full remodel. The place was just too small. And the floor plan had a “cobbled together” feel to it. Their design challenge was to preserve the thing that attracted them to the cottage in the first place — that is, the cottage



A small addition to the kitchen added enough room to accommodate modern appliances and seating, without losing the cottage atmosphere.

itself — while also creating a fresh, modern design with a good use of limited space.

The first task in preparing for the daunting undertaking was, well, to live in it.

“We didn’t want to waste money by rushing, so we waited,” says Joel, who has taken several history-of-

architecture classes and has a keen interest in design.

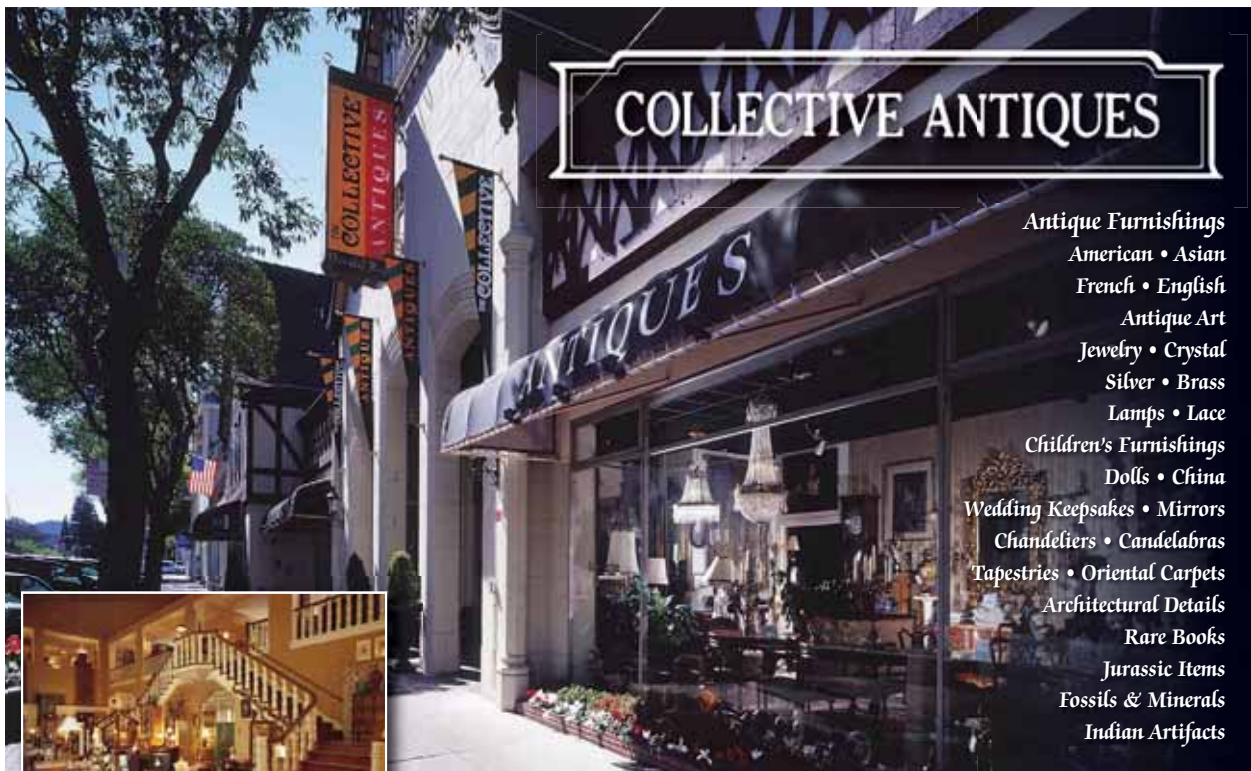
A year and a half after moving in, they hired Portola Valley architect Carter Warr. Soon after they had plans, but in two phases — the first focusing on the existing cottage and a small addition, the second on a basement renovation and

larger addition. Located just outside Woodside, the property falls under San Mateo County planning rules. One ordinance presented an obstacle: The entire house must conform to current-day building codes when the cost of a project exceeds 50 percent of the county’s estimated value of the house — a costly option for a cottage as old as theirs. Given the scope of their project, they went for a phased approach.

To save money, Joel and Tim took on the “county liaison” role, submitting all plans themselves. “Developing a good relationship with the planning staff was key. We found out who would work with us to solve problems rather than throwing up obstacles,” Joel says.

Phase I, now completed, included a new foundation with 17, 10-foot-deep piers and a complete remodel of the existing interior and exterior. Walls separating the kitchen, living and dining rooms came down and a truss-and-beam ceiling was

continued on next page



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New French doors lead from the living room out onto the deck, nestled in the redwoods.

continued from previous page

installed to create an open, light space. The front door was relocated and the tiny dining room transformed into a bright entry hall. New French doors were added to the living room opening onto the front garden, enhancing the feeling of space.

A small addition of 140 square feet to the kitchen was just enough

to make a difference, and new walnut cabinets, CaesarStone counters, Viking appliances and several free-standing pieces of furniture give it an eclectic feel. New windows, wood floors, skirting boards and molding complete the interior's new decoration.

And the remodeled exterior is the picture of a modern cottage, with terraced stone walls, copper gutters,

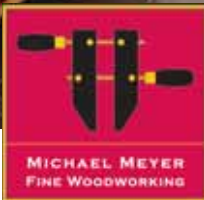
sage wood siding, a slate grey door and matching front fence.

Covered parking, required by the County, presented a fresh set of challenges. Parking for the property is at street level, while the house is down a gentle slope. The architect's design called for a two-car garage. But when the couple looked at the story poles they knew a structure would block too much sunlight. Tim designed the carport himself, taking inspiration from garden pergolas. He also designed the front-yard fence to complement the carport.

"A garage would have been a mistake. And the carport was a fraction of the cost, so a win win," Joel says.

Phase II of the project, set to begin next year, will focus on the back of the house where a basement will be improved to create a second living room, bedroom and bathroom and an extension on top of it will add a large master bedroom.

But Joel and Tim are enjoying



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the cottage as it is and taking their time before the next phase of remodeling. "We love the house now. And while our design and construction teams were great, we're in no rush to have everyone back," Joel says. **h+g**

Resources:

Architect: Carter Warr, CJW Architecture, Portola Valley, 650-851-9335

Building contractor: Ron Perez Construction, Castro Valley, 650-814-2993

Interior designer: Sandra Poza, ASID, San Francisco, 415-387-2000

Useful resource: San Mateo County's Planning and Building website — www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/planning

Goal of project/design challenge:

To remodel the cottage without losing its charm

Unexpected problems/hidden costs:

County's 50 percent rule

Year house built:

1930

Size of home:

950 sq ft after Phase I addition, on 8,280-sq-ft lot

Time to complete:

Phase I: Three years from the time they hired the architect; Phase II: expected in 2010-2011

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Here are a few tips to help you decide if it is time to replace your mattress and box spring set.

- Do you wake up with stiffness or aches and pains?
- Have you had a better night's sleep somewhere other than your own bed?
- Is your mattress overused? Does it sag, have an exposed interior or have lumps?
- Are you no longer comfortable on your mattress and box spring set?

If your answer is yes to any of these, it is time to replace your mattress.

Consider these tips when you're out shopping for a mattress:

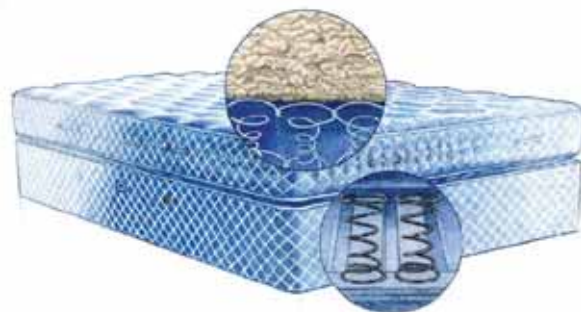
First, know what signifies a quality mattress. Talk to your mattress salesperson about how the mattress is constructed.

Things to look for:

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- A box spring built with steel coils. This flexibility relieves pressure and enhances support. For best comfort, avoid rigid platform construction.
- When physically testing the mattress, lie down on the mattress for at least 15 minutes.
- Relax. Listen to your body. Let your body tell you what's comfortable for you now. Your comfort needs may have changed since the last time you bought a mattress.
- Comfort is personal. Firm isn't necessarily better. Choose a mattress that allows your body to relax quickly and naturally.
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Learning how a mattress is made is an important part of buying the mattress that will fit your specific needs.



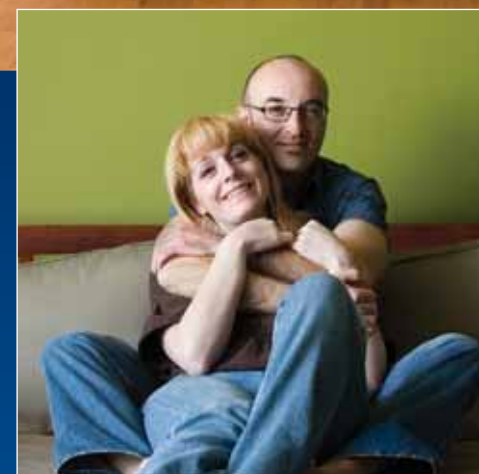
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CLEAN LINES, SIMPLE COLOR PALETTE

Couple transforms cottage to custom family house



Shane Yocum's dream kitchen features dark wood cabinets and floors, contrasted by a light granite countertop.

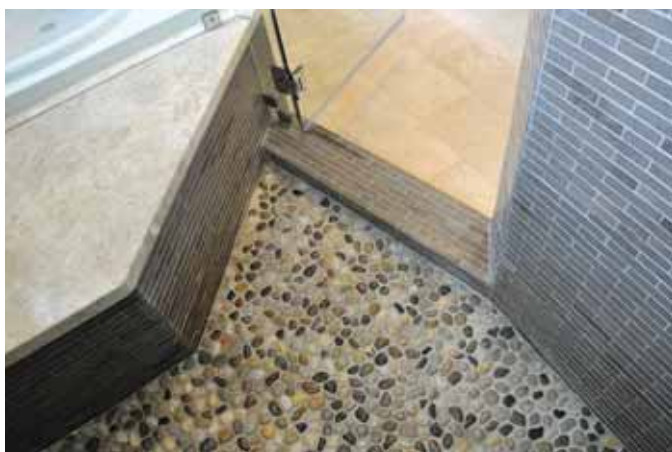
by Kathy Schrenk / photos by Dasja Dolan

“**Y**ou get what you pay for.”
It may be one of the oldest clichés, but it's also one of the truest, as Shane and Shari Yocum learned when they hired an architect to build their new Mountain View home.

continued on page 16



Arches are repeated throughout the remodel, from the front door to the master bath tub.



Contrasting textures highlight the spa-like master bath.

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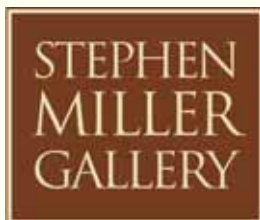
"In my travels to the great rug weaving centers of the world, I've discovered that the most important aspect of rug is not the region it comes from. Nor is the number of knots per square inch. It's how nuances of design, color

and texture all come together to tell a story that resonates with you."

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continued from page 14

The couple planned to do most of the design work themselves, so they figured they could hire someone cheap to shepherd the project through the permitting and technical process. They realized they had chosen poorly when the architect started dragging his feet on getting the permits, even insulting the city staff members whose approval they needed to start construction. He ended up delaying the project a whole year.

Of course they were very careful when replacing him, and hired a respected construction firm to head up the design and building.

It was a substantial project: They tore down all but two small walls of the 1,200 square-foot house and in its place built a fully custom 2,200-square-foot home. It needed some foundation work, and there was a back-yard pool, which they decided to fill in — a decision made easy by the fact that they have three young

children.

They had purchased the home from the original owner, who had changed little since moving in, in 1953. It was replete with orange Formica in the kitchen.

Shane, the cook in the family, envisioned the new kitchen with all the latest features — truly the centerpiece of the house's great room. He's an avid viewer of cooking shows and took his inspiration from the television and magazines he pored over. "I probably obsessed about it more than I needed to," he says.

The obsession evidently paid off: Shane and Shari both say they got what they wanted — the kitchen of Shane's dreams, and a spa-like master bath for Shari. They also strove for functionality above all, and got it.

Shane's priority was the kitchen, and he carefully chose each material himself. Early on he decided on dark wood cabinets, later opting for light countertops. At first he

really wanted marble because of the color, but he was talked out of it by anyone and everyone willing to give him an opinion: Granite would be much more long-lasting and easier to care for. He searched high and low and finally found a granite light enough to suit him.

Once everything was in place, he felt like they got "lucky" with some of the design elements: "Like the floor," he said, "you see a piece of board and you don't really know what it looks like until it's laid, but it sets off the cabinets really well." And after making all those pressure-filled decisions, he got to have fun adding details like the pot-filling faucet above the stove and the under-counter beverage fridge with three different temperature zones (one for juice and soda, one for white wine and one for red wine).

The functionality of clean lines and simple color palettes dictated the house's aesthetic, and it can be seen in the tile backsplash in



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the kitchen and in the bathroom. Arched doorways placed sparingly throughout the house — front door, fireplace, bath tub and transition to bedrooms — give a subtle nod to the Spanish architectural heritage of these East-Coast natives' adopted home state.

But one of the least heralded and most-appreciated features of the house is the 9-foot ceilings, both Shari and Shane say. Adding just a foot over the standard wall height opens up the house in a way they never would have expected.

And while Shari found the wide-open array of choic-

es in layouts and materials overwhelming, Shane found it liberating. "We pretty much had what we wanted," he says. "I didn't want it to look like we half did it; that's why we put the tile on the backsplash and the higher-end cabinets." **H+G**

Resources:

Architect and contractor: David Durr, Invision Design & Construction, Inc., Sunnyvale, 408-752-9033

Tile installer: JNL Marble & Granite Livermore, 408-752-9033

Painter: Manuel Reyes, Alpha & Omega Painting Company, Campbell, 408-561-1858

Goal of project/design challenge:

Build a highly functional, custom home for a family of five with a gourmet kitchen and spa-like master bath

Unexpected problems/hidden costs:

First architect's lack of professionalism delayed the project for about a year

Year house built:

1953

Size of home, lot:

Original home was 1,200 sq ft;
new home is 2,100 sq ft on a 7,500-sq-ft lot

Time to complete:

Eight months

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From stark to welcoming

A warmer color palette greets visitors to this Palo Alto home

by Carol Blitzer /
photos by Dana Ullman

When Martha Klein and her former boyfriend bought their charming Southgate home in 2006 — spotted while on the nearby bike path — the Southern-raised Klein knew she didn't want to live long with her beau's black leather couch and coffee table.

Nor was she fond of the massive, built-in pine cabinet in the living room — which she dubbed “the monster” — that stuck out into a doorway.

But it took a break-up and a year and a half before Klein took control of her home space.

“I wanted to do some self-nurturing,” Klein says, so she adopted two rescued kittens — and decided to redo the living room “to reflect my own values and personality.”

Klein's friend, Mary Pat Rondthaler, was just starting her interior design business, so she was called in for a consultation. A business relationship soon clicked, building on their earlier friendship.

Klein already knew that she wanted a warmer room, and she had chosen a palette of silver blue



Martha Klein purged her home of black leather, replacing the heavy furniture with a warmer palette of silver blue and brown in traditional styles. The built-ins match the white plantation shutters.

and brown. A trip to Macy's with Rondthaler produced a traditional sofa, chair and ottoman. Rondthaler helped narrow down the fabric and trim choices.

“Martha's style is based on where she had lived. She's from Winston-Salem, N.C., and has lived in London,” Rondthaler says.

“I don't like modern. I wanted warm and traditional,” Klein adds.

Next came choosing paint colors:

Benjamin Moore's Clay Beige for the walls, Harbor Haze for the foyer and dining room trim.

Finding the right stain for the wood floors was a challenge, since Klein loathed the off-white, but feared getting it too dark. Once more Rondthaler steered her toward just the right tone.

Before the floors could be done, the pine “monster” had to be dis-

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mantled and moved. Once in pieces, however, the cabinet maker John Ferkel offered to help her re-use the lower pieces as excellent storage in the garage — and removed the bulky upper part.

Ferkel then constructed a new bookcase/entertainment center with storage, finished in white to match the plantation shutters.

Next came replacing the old brown tile at the base of the fireplace with green marble. The same 6- by 6-inch tiles were used on the large window sill, as well as alternated with white travertine on the entry floor.

Klein solicited three quotes for every major piece, and felt she was able to negotiate with tradesmen who were either just entering the business or expanding into this geographical area. She has nothing but positive things to say about her painter, cabinet maker, and, of course, her designer.

“Mary Pat was very helpful in

giving me confidence” when making choices, for instance, when choosing the floor color, she says. She also credits her with helping her find the “right” components, such as her living room rug and the Sherrill furniture pieces.

One bonus to the re-design: She had to move her piano out of the dining room into a back bedroom when the floors were refinished. She quickly discovered she really enjoyed playing piano while looking out at her back garden — far more than adjacent to that famous bike path.

There are still a few finishing touches missing — a coffee and side tables, perhaps a mirror for one wall, but Klein feels she achieved just what she wanted: “I got the masculine out and the warmth in.” **h+g**

Resources:

Interior designer: Mary Pat Rondthaler, Feathered Nest Design, Redwood City, 650-575-1104

Cabinets: John Ferkel, Ferkel’s Fine Woodworking, San Jose, 408-379-7599, 408-287-8913

Floors: Carl Santo, Town & Country Flooring Center, 1460 El Camino Real, Menlo Park, 650-329-8926

Painting: Jin Choi, Tiger Construction, Inc., Sunnyvale, 408-691-1097, jchoi@tigerconstructions.com

Goal of project:

Warm up living room by removing stark masculine touches

Unexpected results:

Cabinet maker split old pine sideboard and moved to garage

Year house built:

1945

Size of home:

1,960 sq. ft.

Time to complete:

5 months

Budget:

About \$21,000

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Petscaping your home

Well beyond basic fencing needs

by Julie Orr and Laura Schaub

A garden can be a safe, comfortable and fun space for pets as well as an attractive environment for people. When working with landscape professionals, ask them to design and care for your garden with your pet in mind.

Do you have an escape-artist dog, a rambunctious cat or an elderly animal peacefully living out his or her golden years? Here are some things you should consider.

The most basic needs for outdoor pets are adequate fencing, shelter from the elements, clean fresh water, enough space to move about and a place to "do their business."

A yard with a good balance of sun and shade, trees, shrubs, paths and paved spaces will be comfortable for both you and your pet, so plan with those elements in mind.

Petscaping for dogs

Many dogs have strong protector instincts, and want to patrol the perimeter of your yard. Planting shrubs and trees several feet away from fences and keeping them pruned up from the ground will allow him damage-free access.

The spaces under the shrubs will also make natural lounging spots. A thick layer of soft wood-chip mulch will create a natural bed. You may choose a distant corner as a place to go when it's "business time."

If your pooch is a digger who longs for freedom, you may wish to install a low concrete barrier under your fences. As an additional precaution, especially if you live on a busy street, consider a double-entry system with auto-closers at the



Julia Powers

Wide pathways in a garden can be dog-kart friendly.

outer gate. In case one gate is left open, the other acts as a fail-safe.

The enclosed area can be a utility area, dog-bathing station or even a temporary kennel as necessary. If your utilities can be located in this dog-free zone, your meter-reader will thank you.

If you have a very big or rambunctious dog and wish to protect your new landscape, it is good to have a dedicated dog area. Side yards make natural dog runs, but for a happier pooch, consider extending it out into the living area so the dog can still be part of the

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family.

There should be shade, a faucet and hose to keep water bowls fresh, and a foot-friendly clean surface such as cedar mulch (repels fleas, too) or pea gravel installed with drain rock underneath for easy cleanups and spray downs.

If you don't choose to have a dog run, you may want to consider temporary wire cages around any susceptible plants until they are settled in.



Julie Orr

Haku enjoys a roll in the sand in a garden designed by Laura Schaub.

If your cat's middle name isn't bird killer, a pond-less ceramic fountain can provide hours of entertainment with visiting insects and birds while also supplying fresh, moving water to your feline. Be sure to always add fresh water either manually or via your irrigation system and never add chlorine.

Although none of us want to think about our pet getting old, it's good to remember that aging pets may develop special

needs. My vet once told me that pets age like humans do. We both start to lose muscle mass, skin starts to sag and joints begin to hurt. As pets get older, they also tend to become less mobile.

Consider the future possibility of needing smooth walking surfaces and wide corners for dog-karts (wheelchairs) and ramps or steps for cats that can no longer leap to their destinations.

The largest request I get from clients is to create a safe, non-toxic environment for their family, their pets and their guests. Since your pets' feet aren't protected with shoes while in the garden (and they lick their feet), specify plants that need little to no fertilizer or pesticide. If you must use, try an organic fertilizer and spray irrigate immediately after application to dissolve completely. For pesky weeds, remove manually and try to prevent them from seeding in the first place with non-toxic weed abatement made from corn meal or a natural smothering method called sheet mulching.

Consider pet-friendly plants in your landscape by avoiding thorny, spiny, sappy and toxic plants that can be harmful to your pet. For an extensive list of toxic plants for dogs and cats visit: <http://aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/>. Besides rhododendrons, other common plants that can be toxic, and even deadly to pets are: azaleas, cycad palms, oleander, foxglove, lily of the valley and castor bean.

With a little planning and understanding of your pet's behavior and needs, you'll have a safe, comfortable and fun petscape for all to enjoy. **h+g**

Julie Orr is a landscape designer in Menlo Park, residing with Sammy, her cat companion of 17 years. Julie can be reached via her website at www.julieorrdesign.com.

Petscaping for cats

For cats consider the same basic elements on a somewhat smaller scale, and forget about fencing them in. Their habits are different from their doggie counterparts. Whereas dogs prefer to be a part of the action most of the time, cats are content to be on their own for hours and will let you know when they are in need of your company.

Low shrubs and grasses that they can lounge under are perfect. Another cat favorite is to roll in dry, warm areas such as pavers, flagstone, or even better, gravel or gold fines.

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