



When Small is Beautiful

Details are the route to the perfect remodel

By Julie Foster

For some people, when it comes to homes bigger is always better. More stuff everywhere is standard decorating procedure. Quantity over quality, no matter what the monetary or psychological price, is what motivates these folks. But one East Sacramento couple has chosen a different route to home happiness.

When they chose to remodel their 1,100-square-foot home, the couple opted for what architect Sarah Susanka, author of *The Not-So-Big-House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live*, describes as “a house that uses less space to give a greater quality to life.”

Catherine Hackney and her husband, Gary Schoonyan, purchased the vintage 1922 home in 1998. Remodeling began in 2003 and took a year. During construction, the family moved into a home down the street owned by Hackney’s husband. This relocation offered a big benefit.

“We were the cleanup crew, which saved us some money, allowed us to be here every night and we could watch the progress that was made each day,” she explains.

In order to add a second story, the builders literally took the house apart all the way down to the lath and plaster, says Hackney. The remodel boosted the square footage to 2,400. Fortunately, there weren’t many surprises. Hackney credits the people involved.

“What makes these types of projects go smoothly is having quality



Located on a tree-lined street in East Sacramento, this former two-bedroom home offers lots of open space and natural light

professionals who respect these older, sometimes rickety homes,” she says.

The couple worked with architect Michael Malinowski, whose work they were familiar with. He suggested using Mills Builders as the contractors.

“Jonathan Mills, besides a wonderful contractor, is a trained architect and has a real affinity for the design and construction of remodeling older homes,” Hackney explains.

She credits Malinowski with showing her how to envision her

new home. Borrowing from Japanese tradition, she imagined the home from the inside out rather than outside in. She also had an idea of her own.

“Ever since I was a little girl, I can remember lying in bed and looking out my window and seeing limbs and leaves. It was always so soothing that I wanted to create that feeling in this house as well,” she says.

She has reason to prize a sense of calm. She has two busy teenage sons and an exacting career.

“I work in a very adversarial atmosphere in the legislature, and when I come home I want to relax and unwind,” Hackney says.

The colors throughout the unpretentious yet sophisticated home are subtle and beautiful. To keep the palette simple, Hackney chose white for all the trim and windows, with agate, carbonite and limestone as quiet contrast colors.

“We love bringing in the outdoors—it’s magical,” she says. High-quality Loewen windows from

Canada are left uncovered throughout the home.

“We are at the end of a long block without much traffic, and so you would never know that we’re in the middle of a city,” says Hackney.

Every window has a special view, from the delicate Japanese maple outside the cozy breakfast nook to the treetop view from the window seat in the master bedroom.

There is a refreshing absence of clutter, with just a few special family heirlooms and well-crafted Arts and Crafts furniture pieces. Hackney’s great-grandmother’s desk and heirloom plates mix easily with inviting puffy chairs in front of the living room fireplace.

Upstairs, the master bedroom suite boasts a work/relaxation space



The living room is light and inviting

with desks for Hackney and her husband, a fireplace and two sets of French doors.

The bedroom has a huge window with an ample window seat that creates the feeling of forested seclusion. Above the window is a special treat: a second smaller window that allows Hackney the precious limb-and-leaf view she remembers from her childhood in Marin County.

But the bathroom wins the prize for most dramatic view. When you step in the shower, you get a double dose of green. Standing on the Carrara marble, you look through the bedroom at the treetops. If you turn your gaze slightly, you see more trees reflected in the wall of mirrors over the sinks. It’s as if you’re standing in an elegant outdoor shower.

When asked if they would do anything different, Hackney and her husband both say no. The remodel

turned out even better than they expected. What’s brought them the most enjoyment? Definitely the beautiful windows. Advice they would offer to those wanting deep satisfaction from a home can be found in Susanka’s principles: Design spaces you will use every day. Instead of striving for more square footage, put your remodeling dollars into the best materials you can afford, such as quality windows and flooring. Carve out small spaces within bigger ones so you can accomplish more within a smaller space. And enjoy.

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Catherine Hackney loves the view from her bedroom window seat



A cozy breakfast nook is the perfect place for a relaxing Sunday breakfast