



Personalizing an Everyday Ranch

Open up the space, add smart lighting and sharp design, then watch a humdrum house become a real humdinger



Inset photo: Courtesy of the authors

Getting more from the same space. Peter and Nancy decided early on that the living room should take better advantage of its south-facing windows. In addition to upgrading the windows, they reframed the ceiling to the rafters for more space. They designed and built storage and display units for the end wall; a smaller opaque window is private but brightens the wall. Photos taken at A on floor plan.



**BY NANCY McCOY
AND PETER JUDGE**

Drive through any development, and all the houses probably look the same, even after the latest remodel craze has swept the neighborhood. Unless you live there, it's hard to imagine that those houses are capable of rising above their ho-hum roots. But the interiors can go places the exteriors can't.

A few years ago, we wanted a bigger house with room enough for a home office and a workshop. We live at the epicenter of high-priced real estate, San Francisco, so finding an affordable place that fit the bill was going to be tough. Eventually, we found a barely affordable ranch house in a development built in the early '60s.

From the exterior, the house didn't exactly get our creative juices flowing. The interior had period details that included low popcorn ceilings, small windows, hollow-core doors, and a faux-lava fireplace, but the space was more than adequate. A big plus was that the property backed onto conservation land, so the backyard view was an enormous asset. With the exception of a new entry treatment and new windows, we've hardly touched the exterior. But with some major floor-plan changes, bigger windows, better lighting, and a great kitchen, we transformed the interior into anything but mundane.

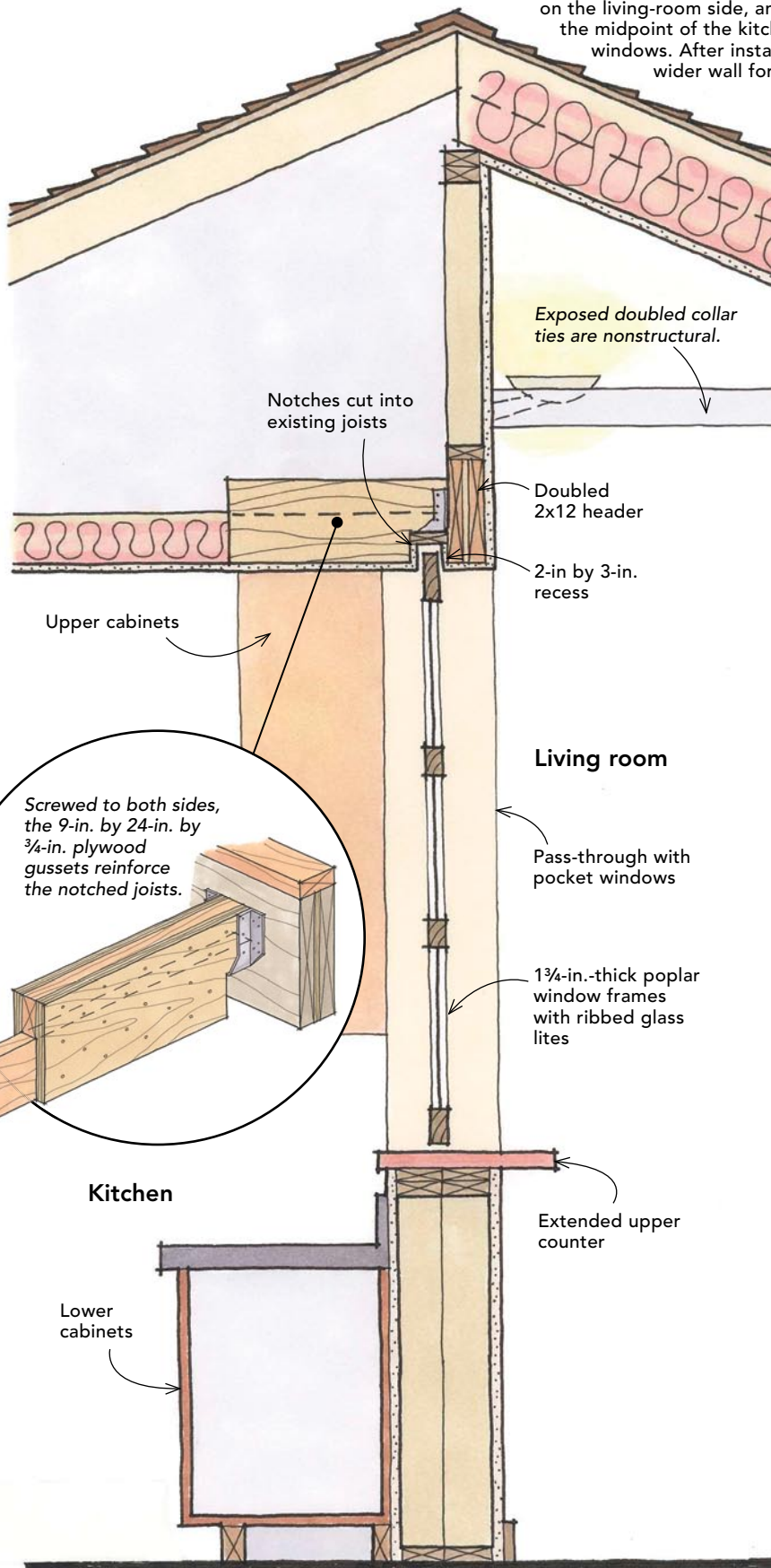
Demolition can work as a reorganizing tool

The initial phase of the renovation was satisfying, in a crowbar sort of way. We pulled down a wall separating two bedrooms as well as some bathroom and closet walls to make a large office space. The kitchen and the fireplace wall hit the Dumpster in short order, too.

We wanted to open the living-room ceiling, so after pulling down the popcorn ceiling,

A CATHEDRAL CEILING CALLS FOR A TALLER WALL

One of our big goals was to get more space and lighting into the living room, and the fastest path was to create a cathedral ceiling. Because the house was framed with 2x6 rafters on 24-in. centers, we had to use a lot of reinforcement. We extended the central wall to make it a bearing wall, removed the 2x6 ceiling joists on the living-room side, and sistered 2x12s to the living-room rafters. At roughly the midpoint of the kitchen, we reframed a 6-ft.-wide opening for pocket windows. After installing a doubled 2x12 header, we needed only to create a wider wall for the pocket with additional 2x4 framing.



our contractor ripped out the ceiling joists and extended the middle wall up to the ridge, creating a bearing wall (drawing left). To support the roof, he sistered 2x12s to each of the 2x6 rafters on the living-room side. On the opposite side of the new bearing wall, we planned the new kitchen.

Peter needed shop space to make the trim and cabinets for the house, so we split the garage: the outboard side for the shop, the inboard half for a den and laundry room.

At the other end of the house, we straightened out a confusion of doors masquerading as a hallway. We also reorganized back-to-back bathrooms by enlarging the bath closest to the master bedroom. The remaining bath was downsized to guest status.

The strength of the horizontal line drives the interior

Like most other ranches, this house had a strong horizontal element in its design: one story, low-pitched roof, and groups of small windows on each wall. Seen from the inside, however, the house seemed like a series of boxes. To increase the sense of space, we emphasized the horizontal wherever we could; it's a design device that makes the eye move along that plane, extending the scale. For instance, a continuous band of trim runs 12 in. below the ceiling throughout the bedroom wing. The band of wall above the trim is painted the same lighter color of the ceiling, a technique that makes even small rooms seem bigger. Other elements such as deep windowsills in the living room, horizontally divided lites, and three-panel doors (instead of flat slabs) furthered the concept.

The kitchen and the dining room trade places

We moved the kitchen from its spot along the northeast wall to the interior, a move that allowed us to relocate the dining room. To keep the kitchen as central as possible, we opened a 6-ft.-wide pass-through that lets in light and a view of the yard from the living room. The cook on duty can talk to guests, pass out drinks, and work at the same time. When we have dinner parties and want to keep down the noise of prep and cleanup, we can close the pass-through windows and a full set of pocket doors that lead to the dining room.

Before Peter built the kitchen cabinets, he used cardboard and plywood to mock up the sizes and locations of the cabinets and counters. When it came time to build, there weren't many surprises. After realizing that our big commercial range would take up more counter space than we had planned, Peter used the mock-up idea again



Options are always good. Opening the kitchen to the living room with a pass-through keeps light and conversation flowing between the two rooms. When formality dictates, the pocket windows can be closed. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

GAINING BETTER SPACE WITHOUT AN ADDITION

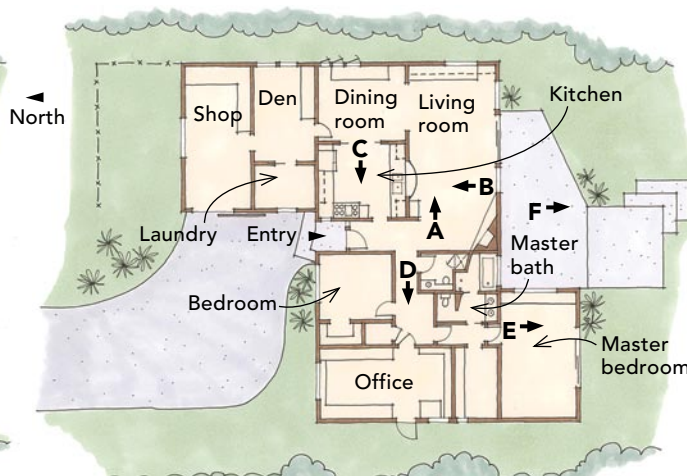
Rather than build an addition, we looked carefully at the floor plan and decided there was plenty of space for our needs. We moved the kitchen to the center of the house, and the dining room took its place on the eastern wall. We split the garage: one half for a small den/laundry room, the other for the woodshop. Two small bedrooms were combined to make an office, and we created a master suite by stealing space from a former bedroom.

SPECS

- Bedrooms:** 2
- Bathrooms:** 2
- Size:** 2400 sq. ft.
- Cost:** N/A
- Completed:** 2006
- Location:** Marin County, Calif.
- Designers:** Peter Judge and Nancy McCoy



Before



After

Photos taken at lettered positions.



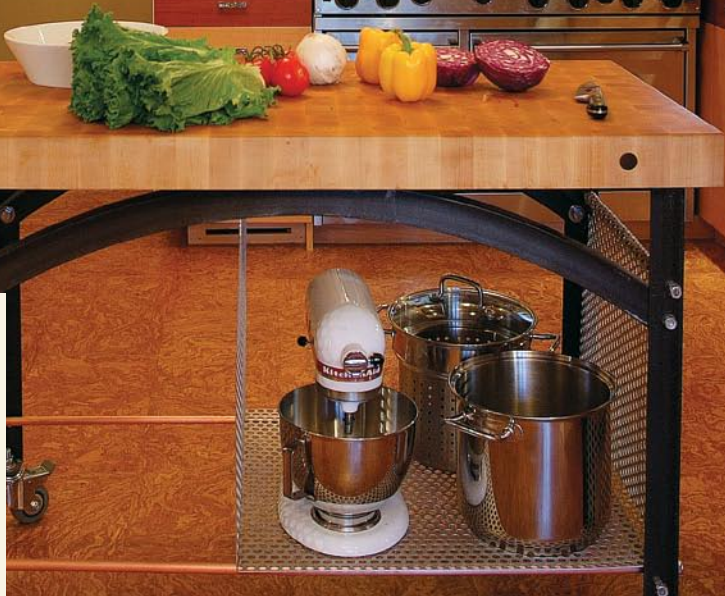


LIGHTING

HERE'S HOW A LIGHTING DESIGNER LIGHTS HER OWN HOUSE



In the new kitchen (photo above, taken at C), Nancy McCoy had a chance to work for herself. The centerpiece is a decorative pendant of glass and wrought iron by Lightspann (www.lightspann.com). A potentially dim back hallway (photo left, taken at D) was transformed by the addition of pinhole spot fixtures.



1 www.iris-lighting.com
Over the sink, focused task lighting (model #P3MR) is provided by two pinhole recessed lights; each fixture consists of an MR16 lamp housed in a 4-in.-dia. recessed can.



2 www.heralighting.com
Work-friendly task lighting is provided by undercabinet halogen puck lights (model #TR20) by Hera Lighting.



3 www.lightolier.com
Recessed linear fixtures by Lightolier (www.lightolier.com) with two 50w MR16 lamps (model #PA2M1675) provide ambient and task lighting that grazes the cabinets and washes the wall.



Using a space to its best advantage. The area below the high windows in the master bedroom is a good location for built-in storage. Peter made the unit from poplar and MDF; the shallow arc of the midrail lightens the design. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

to design and build a mobile island. He used plywood and 2x2s to make sure that the island wasn't too top heavy, and he was able to cut curved templates so that the local metal fabricator could bend the angle-iron supports for the butcher-block top.

Light changes the world

The combination of small windows and fairly deep overhangs meant that, except for the living room, the interior was dim during much of the day. All the windows and sliders were original, single-glazed, and ready to be replaced. We installed bigger units wherever we could to take advantage of the views and light from the backyard. The most dramatic of these swaps took place in the master bedroom, where the original cell-like 18-in. by 84-in. group installed 4 ft. from the floor was replaced by a set of 9-ft.-wide French doors that give us access to the backyard. Shades handle privacy concerns.

As we are both in the lighting business, it seemed natural that our house should reflect our belief in the importance of good lighting. We emphasized the new height of the living room with a series of uplight sconces (www.boydlighting.com) that wash the wall and ceiling. The kitchen has a central, dramatic ceiling fixture supplemented by a perimeter of recessed spots for ambient and general task lighting. Undercabinet lights supply more-focused task lighting. In the hallway between the office and the living room, Nancy used pinhole ceiling fixtures to accent hanging art, turning the hallway into a mini-gallery.

Lighting control is an important but often-overlooked aspect of design. With the proper hardware, a homeowner can change the mood or utility of a room by selectively raising or lowering light levels. We decided early on that we would use remote scene controls and chose the Grafik Eye system by Lutron (www.lutron.com). Mounted flush in a central location (ours are on the laundry-room wall), the controls are easy to program and easily adaptable to various fixtures. Individual wall-mounted controls in each of the major rooms let us choose one lighting scene from a selection of four programmed options; hit the button, and all the lights in the room go to their designated levels. Because the main controls are accessible and easy to use, it's easy to go back and change levels or scenes. □

When they're not working, Nancy McCoy and Peter Judge relax at home in Marin County, Calif. Photos by Charles Bickford, except where noted.



The backyard oasis. Because the property abuts conservation land, the quiet, lush backyard feels larger than it is. A low covered deck that catches morning sun is a popular spot for breakfast and dinner parties. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

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