

# Inside a Model

A small addition and a savvy design transform a small California bungalow

BY KRISTA BECKER

As an architect, I've been fortunate to be involved in a variety of projects throughout my career—everything from high-rises to hospitals. Most recently, I've been focused on large-scale civic work—specifically, designing embassies around the world. The work is both demanding and rewarding, and it requires a considerable amount of travel. But as every trip nears its end, I look forward to returning to the small bungalow I've called home for the past 15 years in the Sunset Park area of Santa Monica, Calif.

My home was originally built in 1939 as part of a collection of houses constructed for the employees of the nearby Douglas Aircraft Company, renowned for producing the Douglas World Cruiser, the first aircraft to circumnavigate the globe (in 1924).

I was attracted to the house because of its appropriately sized rooms, its good bones, and its well-conceived layout. Public spaces were organized on one side of the house and private spaces on the other. The house met my needs at the time, and I felt it had the core elements that would yield plentiful design opportunities sometime down the road.

As the years went by, my family grew, and so did the demands on our home. That “sometime down the road” was now at our doorstep, and I decided it was time for a redesign. Despite my extensive work in architecture, this remodel would be my very first residential project.

## An ordinary wish list

Over the years, I often considered how I wanted our home to live. For instance, I've always wanted a house with a strong con-





# Remodel



## WHY IT WORKS

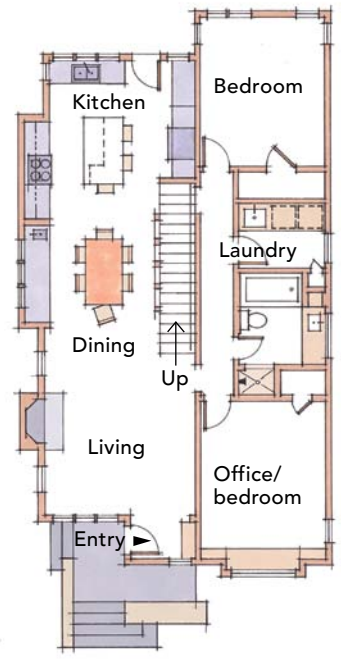
Organizing the new floor plan to create a contiguous living area made the home feel expansive, while providing the practical benefit of easier child supervision. The private spaces—bedrooms and bathrooms—are placed along a central circulation loop around the new stair, which provides access to the new master suite on the second floor. Should access to the master suite ever become an issue, the full bath and main-floor bedrooms can accommodate single-floor living.

## SPECS

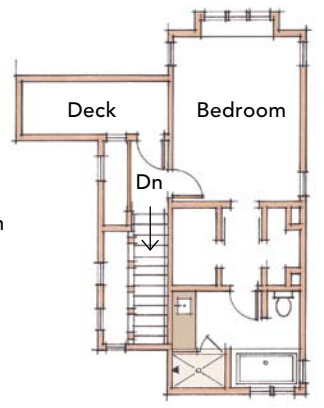
- Bedrooms:** original, 2; renovated, 3
- Bathrooms:** 2
- Size:** original, 1067 sq. ft.; renovated, 1565 sq. ft.
- Cost:** \$186 per sq. ft.
- Year built:** original, 1939; renovated, 2012
- Location:** Santa Monica, Calif.
- Architect:** Krista Becker, FAIA
- Builders:** Klaus Becker Construction; Pandro Soklow Construction, pandrosoklow.com



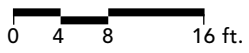
Original first floor



Renovated first floor



New second floor



## BEST REMODEL

Krista Becker designed our best remodel of the year, a complete reinvention of a 1930s bungalow in Southern California. The whole-house remodel uses smart design strategies—replicable in any remodel—to modernize the floor plan and to create bright, contemporary interior spaces that are inviting and easy to live in.

"Before" photo: courtesy of Krista Becker. Drawings: Martha Garstang Hill.



# FOUR REMODEL MUST-HAVES

## 1 VIEWS

Wherever daylight is brought in, views extend out and help to expand the sense of space. In this home, window head heights were raised beyond the standard 6 ft. 8 in. to 7 ft. 2 in., a subtle adjustment with a substantial impact. Windowsills were extended as close to adjacent surfaces as possible, and glazed doors were added to reduce the sense of a physical boundary between the outdoors and the indoors.



**Command central.** The kitchen is the hub of activity. The island, with a Caesarstone Quartz Reflection top, is lit by three Bega pendants. It's designed to be used as a breakfast bar, prep space, and worktable.



## 2 FINISHES

A simple palette lends itself to small homes by allowing spaces to flow seamlessly into each other. All the main-floor spaces in this home were painted with Sherwin-Williams Duration in satin First Star gray paint. Products and materials were selected for their durability and ease of maintenance. BrookHaven cabinetry by Woodmode and Caesarstone countertops, for instance, can be found throughout the home. Keeping the materials consistent establishes continuity.

nection to its backyard, which is the largest “room” in the house here in Southern California. I wanted a welcoming entry, an open kitchen with a large island, and a master suite with a deep soaking tub. I wanted all of the spaces to be finished with beautiful, low-maintenance materials. I envisioned a bright interior, with daylight pouring through windows that also provided views of our yard.

I craved the convenience of a laundry room and the luxury of a room that could serve as an office and as a bedroom for guests. Finally, I wanted a flexible space for my son to play in that wouldn't dominate the house.

Although our original house was only a touch beyond 1000 sq. ft., I was able to achieve everything on my wish list with minimal expansion. A 158-sq.-ft addition to the

back of the house and a 340-sq.-ft. second-story addition were among the subtle moves that transformed our small bungalow into a spacious family-friendly home.

### Gaining access through an open plan

Any family with kids values the importance of a layout that maximizes visual access to all parts of the house. But like those of many



**CABINERY**  
wood-mode.com

**COUNTERTOP**  
caesarstoneus.com

**KITCHEN PENDANT**  
bega-us.com

**DINING-ROOM PENDANT**  
louispoulsen.com

**PAINT**  
sherwin-williams.com

**STAIR PANEL**  
rulonco.com

### 3 OPEN SPACE

Removing walls to open up a floor plan has obvious benefits. Yet too often, the spaces within that open plan are not specifically defined. Here, varying the ceiling height between the kitchen, the dining room, and the living room helps to distinguish the boundaries of each space and brings order and logic to the layout.

older homes, our original floor plan was divided by walls. It also had some awkward details, such as an entry that deposited you directly into the living room and a rear entry set within a laundry nook in the kitchen.

I began by changing the orientation of the front door to establish a defined entry. Such a change creates subtle experiential qualities; making that change in this house wholly

improved the design and comfort of the adjacent living room.

The living room and the dining room stayed nearly the same size, and the kitchen received a small addition into the rear yard, but none of the spaces are defined by walls. To distinguish each space, I varied the ceiling heights along the length of the house. These variations suggest the boundaries of each

### 4 DAYLIGHT

Daylight makes a small space feel bigger and more comfortable. To increase daylight access, a lightwell, illuminated by a south-facing window and a glazed door above, was placed next to the new stairway. Instead of a conventional stud-wall-and-rail arrangement, the stair is partly constructed with Rulon panels, a commercial ceiling product, which filter daylight into the main living spaces. The panels also provide a bit of transparency, and they increase the perceived width of the dining room.



**The 7/11 stair.** The new stair is based on a rise of 7 in. and a run of 11 in., similar to that found at the entrance of a library. This makes for a deeper but more comfortable set of stairs.



**Improved entry.** Turning the entry door perpendicular to the living room helped create a deliberate entry. Now, guests are welcomed slowly into the home instead of being abruptly deposited into it. With the open floor plan, they can see straight to the backyard.





## A MASTERFUL ADDITION

The master bedroom (above) feels grand due to its vaulted ceiling. Its window seat looks out over the backyard and patio and is the perfect spot to hide away with a book. The bath (right), with its off-center sink that creates more usable counter space, mimics the first-floor bath in fit and finish. Lightolier Vetro pendants hang above the vanity in front of an Ann Sacks Lucian Glossy Oxygen glass-tiled backsplash. Eleganza Avenue Grigio porcelain tile is on the floors and in the shower. Caesarstone tops the vanity and wraps the tub to create a clean, durable, contemporary space.



PENDANTS  
lightolier.com

BACKSPLASH  
annsacks.com

FLOOR  
eleganzatiles.com



**DESIGN VIDEO** For an inside look at this home and those behind its design, visit [FineHomebuilding.com/houses](http://FineHomebuilding.com/houses).

area with a wall of windows and a glass patio door to enhance the connection to the backyard. Now as you enter the house and occupy any one of the main living areas, you see not only the entire length of the house, but nearly the entire length of the property.

### Better baths and bedrooms

The public spaces of the house were not the only spaces in need of an update. The private spaces also needed improvement.

The original back bedroom was expanded to create space for a new laundry room and a larger bathroom, while the front bedroom was redesigned as a multifunctional space. The window area in this front room was tripled to bring in more light, and the end wall was designed with a twin-bed-size window seat flanked by floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

The design of the new master suite was the biggest challenge. This addition occupies a small portion of the back of the house and creates a second story. Keeping the addition small and toward the rear helps to retain the house's original scale.

The first move in designing the addition was to create a sense of arrival with a small landing at the top of the new stair, complete with a bench seat and access to a small deck.

Adjacent to the landing area is the compact master bedroom, with a window seat and a vaulted ceiling that make it feel bigger than it actually is. The window seat overlooks the backyard and is a perfect spot to curl up with a book and supervise outdoor play.

The new master bathroom is located directly above the existing bath, which minimized plumbing runs and the complexity of construction. I designed both bathrooms as four-piece baths with a separate shower and an off-center sink, which provides a larger amount of usable counter space. The materials and the finishes are the same in each bath, but they are complemented with decor that clearly distinguishes my son's space from mine.

### Crafting a kid-friendly home

Toys and clutter multiply with kids and can easily take over the main living spaces of a house. To counter this in my home, I con-





## THE **BIGGEST** ROOM IN THE HOUSE

verted the garage into a playroom with dry-wall, a glass-panel garage door, and carpet tiles. All the toys are organized on shelves, and a train set can stay here for days without anyone tripping over it.

Inside, a small window seat at the back entrance creates a space to store art and homework projects. Hooks above the seat handle jackets and backpacks, and a magnetic whiteboard keeps birthday invitations and grocery lists organized. These versatile spaces take up very little room, but they enhance this home's redesign and make it incredibly enjoyable to live in. □

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The remodel of the house is improved by the connection to the backyard. An outdoor living and dining space is positioned on the existing concrete patio, while the garage is repurposed as a playroom to relieve the home's living spaces of the chaos from kids at play. The house and the garage have both been finished with low-maintenance, integral-color, smooth stucco.

