

Chase Away the Shadows

Clever lighting strategies and creative cabinetry energize a contemporary kitchen and bath

“Bring the outside in” has been a Modernist mantra since the early days of sliding-glass doors and real-estate marketing campaigns. But a peek inside the kitchen of this low-slung thoroughbred California ranch house left the distinct impression that the outside was still out there. A trio of Bay Area architects—Eliza Hart, Stuart Wright, and Alex Bergtraun—bought this neglected Modernist house with these goals in mind: Respect its original intent, and recycle it into a new century. Their approach was to use in a unified manner the materials emblematic of the era when the house was built—concrete, plywood, frosted glass, ceramic tile—in rooms with layers of balanced light.



BEFORE

Problem: Tall, clunky island

Solution: Lower the island to improve sightlines, and widen it to include counter space for prep and barstools.

Problem: Poorly balanced lighting

Solution: Fluorescent tubes hidden behind valances ring the entire room, including above the upper cabinets. Sliding frosted-glass doors with lights behind them add ambient light from the laundry area. Undercabinet lights and pendants provide task lighting.

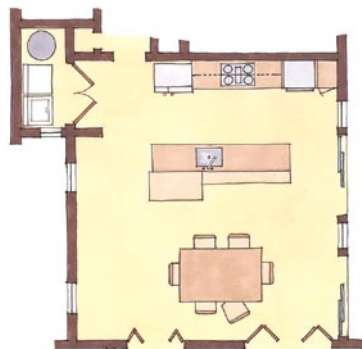


Problem: Chaotic collection of shapes, finishes, and drab colors

Solution: Create a unified palette of rectangular shapes in ceramic tile, maple plywood, concrete, and glass centered around a dazzling lemon-yellow backsplash.

"aha!" moment

The tyrant in the existing kitchen was the sink island, with its awkward top shelf dividing the kitchen/dining space into two rooms. Removing this island would make the room feel larger, but the post embedded in it was still going to be there. The decision to double the size of the island and eliminate the upper shelf is the linchpin of the new plan.



Before

Architects: Eliza Hart, Stuart Wright, San Francisco, Calif.
www.hartwrightarchitects.com;
 Alex Bergtraun, Emeryville, Calif.
www.studiobergtraun.com
Builder: Fiske Builders, Berkeley, Calif.



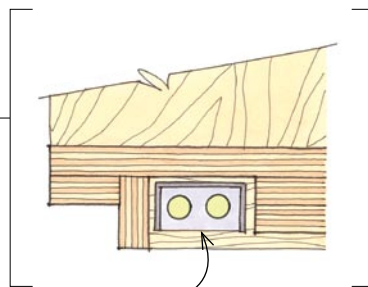
Problem: Loss of pantry space
Solution: A new pantry behind sliding-glass doors

After

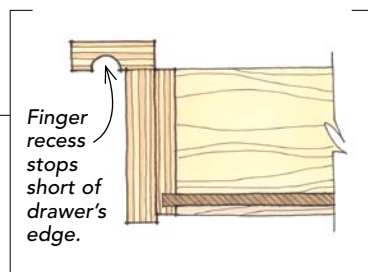


Cool details

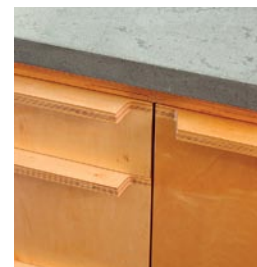
Plywood cabinets that reveal their laminations punch up the Modernist soul of this house. Drawer pulls and door pulls nest when the doors are opened. Finger recesses are routed into the underside of the plywood pulls. Undercabinet lighting is hidden behind plywood trim. The material is Europly from Columbia Forest Products, finished with Minwax wipe-on satin polyurethane.



Light fixture is hidden from view by plywood soffit.



Finger recess stops short of drawer's edge.



BALANCING THE LIGHT IN THE BATH

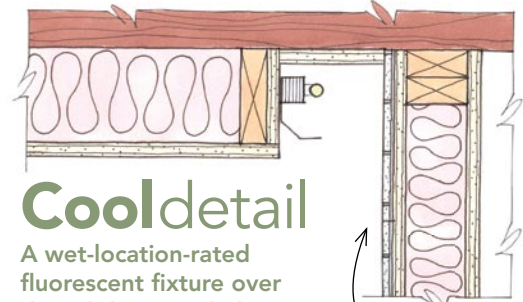
One of the keys to creating a comfortable room is to have light sources from several sides. A fire-lookout tower is at one end of this scale; a cave is at the other. Most rooms fall somewhere in between. In the hall bath, two illuminating strategies team up with the existing north window to balance the light.

Problem: No diffused light from the east side of the room

Solution: Create a cove for a fluorescent-light tube in the shower ceiling.

Problem: No diffused light from the west side of the room

Solution: Vertical sidelites on each side of the mirror grab daylight from the skylight over the hallway next door.



Cool detail

A wet-location-rated fluorescent fixture over the tub bounces light across the entire room.

Back wall of tub surround

