



# Attic Uplift

A dark, dated attic is turned into a bright master suite and workspace

BY JONATHAN FELDMAN

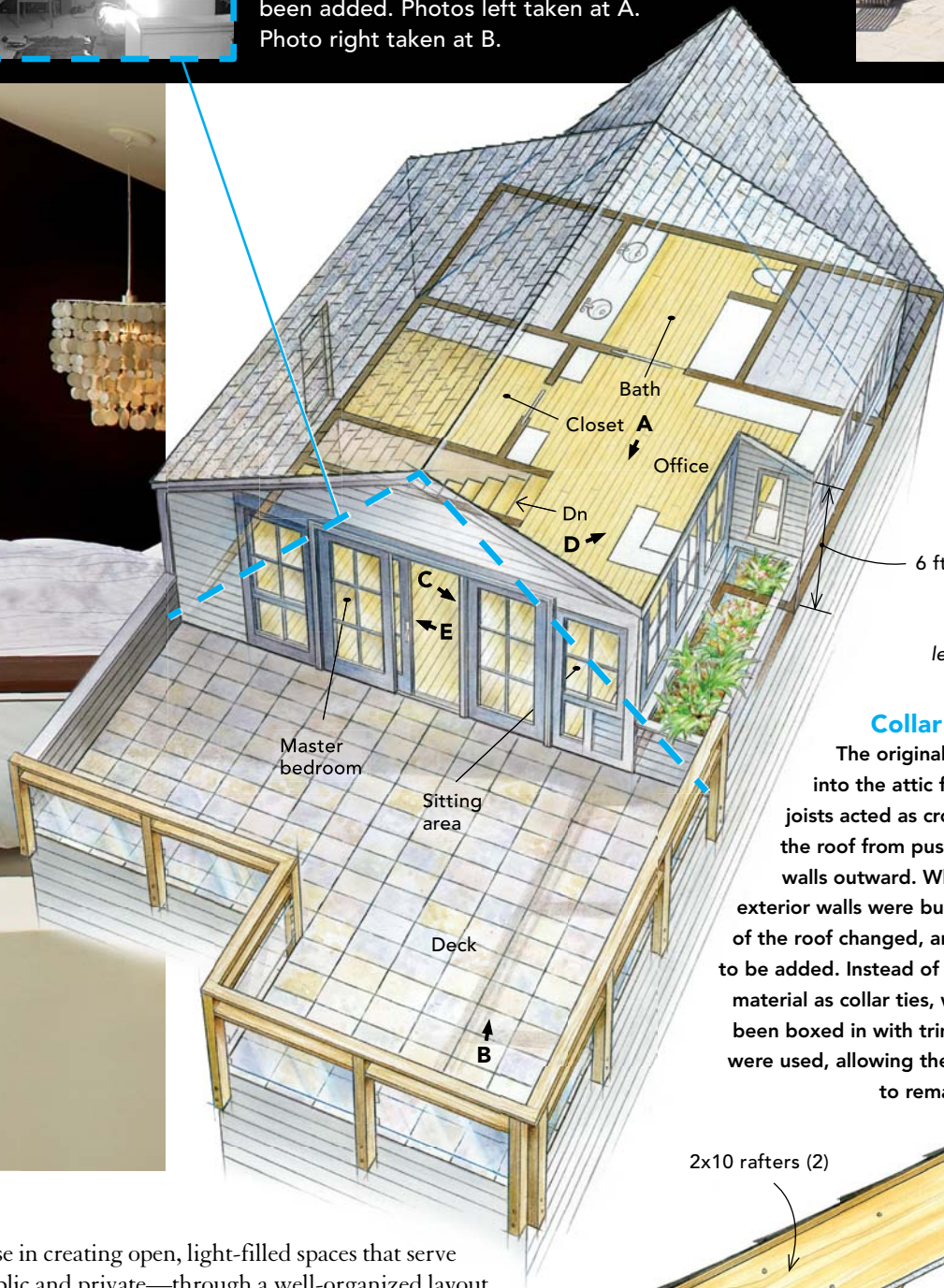
**W**hen my client, a landscape designer, approached my firm, his historic Arts and Crafts town house in the heart of San Francisco had problems common to many older homes: It was dark and dysfunctional. The finished attic occupied valuable interior space, but it sat below a steeply pitched roof and had limited access to daylight or views. Like a lot of attics, this one had kneewalls that confined the floor space with the most headroom to the middle of the house below the ridge. This resulted in only a narrow corridor of usable space.

With the firm's help, the client sought to reinvent the attic as a bright workspace with a new master suite and a comfortable sitting area.



## DESIGN

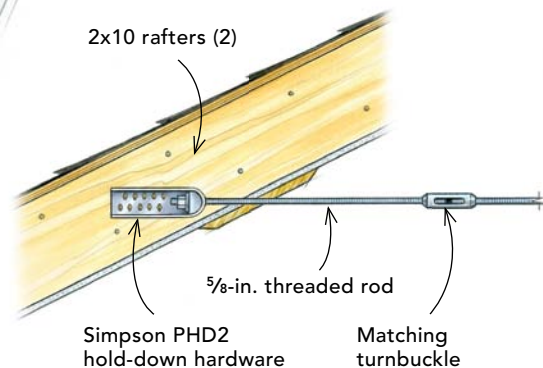
To preserve proportions and exterior details, care was taken not to raise the new walls too high or to flatten the roof too much. The new attic looks like a pair of dormers from the front of the house, but the space is much more functional than if traditional dormers had been added. Photos left taken at A. Photo right taken at B.



Photos taken at lettered positions.

### Collar ties in detail

The original roof rafters tied into the attic floor, so the floor joists acted as cross ties that kept the roof from pushing the exterior walls outward. When new 6-ft.-tall exterior walls were built, the geometry of the roof changed, and collar ties had to be added. Instead of using 2x framing material as collar ties, which could have been boxed in with trim, threaded rods were used, allowing the new attic space to remain visually open.



The design was an exercise in creating open, light-filled spaces that serve a variety of roles—both public and private—through a well-organized layout and carefully considered structural improvements.

### Nowhere to go but up

Local zoning restrictions prevented us from raising the ridge to gain more height in the attic. Instead, we chose to eliminate the kneewalls, to build new 6-ft.-tall exterior walls, and to reduce the roof pitch from 12-in-12 to 5-in-12. This approach expanded the usable floor area by 252 sq. ft., increased the headroom of the attic, and provided ample opportunity for new windows. The owner pre-



# ONE SPACE, THREE USES

## LIVE

The sitting area is set below large metal-clad windows and is adjacent to a rooftop garden and deck. The space blurs the line between public and private. The corner is used as a private area for relaxing alone or as a public space during casual client meetings. Photo taken at C.



## WORK

The office, which is daylit with skylights and a wall of windows, is at the top of the stairs, so guests feel like they're entering a public space rather than a private bedroom. The main work desk is in an alcove created by a jog in the exterior wall and a bank of cabinets to minimize its impact on the rest of the space. Photo taken at D.



viously had remodeled the attic bathroom at the front of the house without changing the roofline. That renovation worked well. We also liked the idea of keeping the steeper roof at the front of the house to preserve the house's original character. In this way, the newly remodeled attic reads as a pair of shed dormers.

### Create well-defined spaces

The overarching goal for the attic was to create a semiprivate area where the owner could sleep, work, read, and on occasion meet with clients. Most of the time, the new space would serve as the inner sanctuary of the house. The challenge was to organize the attic area in such





## SLEEP

The most private space, the sleeping area has a dark, wood-clad wall and is removed from the office space as much as possible. Placed against an exterior wall, where the ceiling height is at its lowest, the sleeping area is designed to be comfortable without feeling confined. Photo taken at E.



## SPECS

**Size:** 522 sq. ft.

**Cost:** \$240 per sq. ft.

**Architect:** Feldman Architecture

**Builder:** Behruz Vahdani, Matrix Seismic Corp.

The exterior wall in the reading corner is pulled 4 ft. from the house's exterior. This jog in the wall allows for taller windows in the corner, space for a small rooftop garden, and a small window adjacent to the work desk. These elements make it the most attractive and the most obvious place to relax.

The sleeping space is defined by the placement of the bed against a wall clad in wood clapboards stained a deep, rich brown to serve as a calming, anchoring element. This wall, along with the chandeliers at the head of the bed, makes the space feel all its own.

Finally, the work area takes maximum advantage of the space along the outside wall, under a low point in the roof, which both expands the floor plan and helps to hide a messy desk. File drawers and cabinets with black laminate countertops create a physical boundary between the work area and the reading and sleeping spaces.

### Establish access to the outdoors

Early on, the client requested direct access from the attic to the outdoors. This is difficult to achieve three stories up, so we designed a rooftop patio over the lower living room. The patio is accessed through a single sliding door in the gable end of the attic and offers views of the San Francisco skyline.

We also added three skylights to flood the workspace with daylight and to provide ambient light to the rest of the attic area. We used metal-clad wood windows of various sizes by Sierra Pacific in the attic's new exterior walls. Only the windows that offer the most ventilation are operable. The rest are fixed, which saved on costs.

Not only do the new windows and skylights bring in plenty of natural light and allow views to extend out, but they also expand the perceived size of the attic, which makes the entire space a more comfortable place in which to live and work. □

a way that when a client did visit, it did not feel like that person was coming into a private bedroom suite.

Our solution was to place the work area at the top of the stairs so that it would be the first thing you see upon entering the space. The reading area is positioned to buffer the workspace from the sleeping area. This keeps visitors from feeling like they're in a bedroom and helps to separate the owner from his work at night.

Each of the three core spaces is designed with architectural elements that define and differentiate it from the others. In the living space, for instance, the bookshelves anchor the seating area and push it away from the exterior wall just enough to maximize headroom.

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