

History In The Remaking By Miriam Raftery Decor & Style: May 2001

“Our goal was to remodel our house and return it as much as possible to the character it had when it was originally built,” says the owner of a vintage Point Loma home.

Constructed in 1936, the residence was designed by famed architect Cliff May. The home had elements of charm, such as a Spanish-style rounded fireplace and view windows in virtually every room. But the 64-year old abode also was showing its age.

“ The infrastructure was all in poor repair,” recalls the owner, who asked that his name not be published. “The master bedroom was in a totally different architectural style that wasn’t in keeping with the rest of the house.”

The home lacked an attractive façade and had interior rooms arranged on multiple levels. In addition, its small, dark kitchen was ill suited to a contemporary lifestyle.

“I am a design-builder,” says the homeowner, who specializes in commercial construction. “We specialize in putting teams together. We wanted to do our house the same way. It was a very collaborative effort...Our goal was to enhance what was already there, to make it lighter and more comfortable as a family home, and to incorporate state-of-the-art technology such as low-voltage systems for security, telephones, category-five computer wiring, and a central entertainment system.”

The owner and his wife initially contacted Rick Fahmie, president of Kitchen Expo, to create plans for a kitchen and master suite remodel. Remodeling plans soon grew to encompass the entire house, entailing a combined effort by Fahmie, contractor Steve Lusk, architect Brian Hansen, AIA, interior designer Joyce Browning, ASID, and a landscape designer Mike Parsons.

Although only 50 square feet were added, the home now has a far more spacious layout that enhances its historical character.

“The bones were very good,” Fahmie says of the home’s architectural style, “but there were too many level changes in the house. It was very choppy.” Level changes on the first story have been eliminated, making the house seem larger. Sandblasting rustic ceiling beams and opening up a loggia, or hall, at the rear of the home further enhanced visual flow.

Standing in a new gourmet kitchen at the heart of the remodeled home, Fahmie recalls, “The kitchen was atrocious—small and closed in, with dark floors, dark cabinets and a lot of avocado green.”

A wall obstructed spectacular backyard views from an adjacent hallway, while a laundry room separated the kitchen from the family room.

Kitchen Expo created color renderings and floor plans to illustrate concepts for a remodeled kitchen and master bath. "I went to their previous home and measured furniture and art pieces," recalls Fahmie, who also provided input on some other areas of the home. "Few people know that Kitchen Expo can do entire home designs."

To open up views in the kitchen, Fahmie recommended removing a wall and relocating the laundry room to a new wing off the master suite. His plans also called for constructing a large beam spanning the length of the remodeled kitchen, providing structural support without visual obstruction.

The spacious new kitchen combines Old World character with modern convenience. Brookhaven knotty pine cabinets by Wood Mode feature an heirloom distressed finish. Juperano granite countertops, a tumbled travertine backsplash and stone floors add to the feeling of a vintage European country kitchen.

"The kitchen was so big that we varied the angles, heights and depths of cabinets to create a visual interest," notes Fahmie, who opted for a pair of islands. "One would have been too long to walk around," he explains. A raised bar on one island hides a cooktop, food preparation area and handy recessed spice rack.

Above, a custom pot rack adorned by a leaf-and-vine motif designed by Browning adds warmth and character. The second island features a butcher-block surface that hides a pop-up television.

Two dishwashers and a Sub-Zero refrigerator/freezer have been integrated into cabinetry, with wooden door and drawer fronts preserving the Old World theme. A garden window displays pottery, while floating glass shelves provide additional space for the owners' collection of artwork.

Space formerly occupied by the hallway now houses a sunny niche occupied by a painted farm table and bench from Joyce Browning's Manor House Collection.

"It is both functional and inviting," the designer says. "The upholstered banquet is a perfect spot to relax."

The kitchen opens into the family room, where an out-of-date freestanding fireplace has been replaced by a new fireplace with travertine surround. "I noticed a chimney stack on the roof that was no longer in use," Fahmie recalls.

"The family room is anchored by a carved wood mantle and an over-sized Tuscan armoire in an antique distressed walnut finish," says Browning, who designed the unusual piece complete with latticed trim and iron handles in a twisted rope motif. The armoire camouflages home entertainment equipment stored discreetly inside. A leather chair from Ralph Lauren, chenille sofa and ottoman table with turned legs complete the

comfortably appointed family room. Lusk Building & Remodeling replaced termite-riddled deck off the family room and kitchen areas using Nexwood.

“It’s a wood polymer made from recycled materials,” notes Lusk. The deck is built around existing trees, preserving the lot’s wooded environment.

“We gutted the house,” Lusk recalls. “There was no drywall or plaster.” All interior surfaces were redone, including walls, floors and ceilings. The exterior was remodeled and a new red-tile roof installed. Even the plumbing and electrical systems were redone. “There were skunks living under the house that had destroyed everything. . . The biggest challenge was tying the entire house together architecturally and bringing together all of the elevations, materials, surfaces and textures on the front, side and rear elevations.”

The builder carefully preserved and restored most of the home’s original wood-framed windows. “We went to a used wood dealer and found wood from an old barn back East,” Lusk recalls. “We built the shutters out of old oak.”

Browning, a former Texas resident accustomed to outdoor living spaces, came up with the idea to create a walled courtyard in front of the house. “Entering into a wonderful outdoor room is a trademark of mine,” says Browning, who designed a wooden Spanish-style gate with iron studs to welcome guests to the home.

Browning worked with Mike Parsons of Parsons DesignScapes to create a hacienda-style courtyard lined with quartz flagstone decking. Massive mahogany entry doors with iron calavos and beveled-glass insets are accentuated by a pop-out section added to the boldly painted gold façade. A refurbished iron balcony above the entry enhances the old-world Spanish ambiance.

Inside, removing a coat closet created space for an art niche in the home’s small but striking foyer with bowed ceiling embellished by painted floral accents.

To the left, the dining room features a second art niche with faux painting by noted San Diego artist Dallas Gambill. A chiseled-edge travertine countertop from Kitchen Expo enhances the niche. A replica of an antique Tuscan ceiling panel has been converted to a dining table by Browning, who embellished the piece with a custom leaf-and-vine motif. Chairs from Ralph Lauren, an iron chandelier, and a custom hand-carved dining buffet complete the space.

To the right of the foyer, the home’s living room retains its historic charm. “This fireplace was architect Cliff May’s signature statement. We wanted to keep this design detail,” recalls Fahmie, standing in front of a beehive-style fireplace with arched top, rounded hearth and decorative Mexican tiles.

Art niches beside the fireplace hold the homeowners' collection of Kachinas and Southwestern pottery. A muted palette, comfortable suede sofas and gold-washed walls by Dallas Gambill allow architectural details to remain the room's key focal points.

The fireplace is double-sided, also warming a his-and-her office behind the living room. Wood Mode cherry cabinets with a mahogany stain provide functionality, accented by pewter knobs and chiseled-edge travertine desktops. A hand-woven silk rug from Turkey is adorned with elephants and rhinos. Acquired by the owners during their travels, the unusual rug adds both elegance and whimsy. Browning designed a curved, hand-carved and faux-painted table as an added touch of opulence.

The master suite has been dramatically remodeled to encompass a separate wing complete with an exercise room, laundry room, master bath, bedroom and separate dressing area.

The design team extended a standard wall at the end of the master bedroom, borrowing space from an exterior deck to create room for a new sitting area, fireplace and expansive master bath.

Now, French doors lead to a rebuilt deck with clear glass panels, affording views of the lushly landscaped backyard.

"Steve pushed out the end of the room. . .We added a pass-through fireplace to separate the master bedroom and bath," Fahmie says.

A cabinet with recessed pocket doors hides a wide-screen TV.

"The generous master bedroom suite is quiet, comfortable and uncluttered," notes Browning. A carved leather Oriental screen serves as a backdrop for an upholstered bed with brocade linens and pillows adorned with fringe, braiding and velvet trim. Additional decorative touches include a Navarre wall lantern, Roman-style window shade, custom velvet chair and ottoman.

An arched passageway faux-finished to resemble stone on walls and ceiling leads to the sumptuous master bath, where a raised spa tub in a marble surround overlooks a bamboo garden through two walls of mitered glass.

"The minute I saw the bamboo, I wanted to bring the outside inside," says Fahmie

The tub area overhangs a deck in the side yard. "We designed cantilevering for the window where the tub is, along with the homeowner and architect," Lusk notes.

The new bath also features a shower complete with water jets embedded in travertine walls, art niches with recessed lighting above a cozy fireplace and a curved cherry vanity by Wood Mode.

“We didn’t want a straight look, so we bowed the countertop and faceted the cabinets,” Fahmie notes

Originally, the home’s first story had only one bath. The design team created space for a powder room beneath a staircase near the center of the home. A faux painted vanity in rustic copper and silver tones dresses up the small but attractive space complemented by a pewter sink, marble knobs and iron scones. “Before, this was just dead space,” Fahmie recalls.

Stairs leading to a second story have also undergone a startling transformation.

“We literally saved old steps from the house,” Lusk says of the original red concrete stairs. “Joyce Browning found a marvelous painter who painted grout lines in the stair treads to resemble tile.”

Authentic Spanish tiles were added to risers. At the top of the landing, sunlight floods through glass doors leading to a refurbished iron balcony.

“The entire upstairs also was remodeled,” says Lusk, who knocked down walls and reconfigured the upstairs spaces.

At one end, a girl’s suite resembles a tree house with views through leafy branches across the rooftop. A guest suite down the hall has been appointed by Browning in creamy hues for a clean, fresh look.

“The project is a good example of a team approach to a project that reflects the cooperative efforts of all the professional team members,” Lusk says of the finished remodel. “It all ties together from one end to another. . . It’s rare to find a homeowner so willing to invest the time in the communication and detailed planning with team members.”

Fahmie, agrees. “This was a great experience working with the clients during the design process.”

Prior to beginning the remodel, the homeowner celebrated by hosting a ‘First Foot’ party in the tradition of his Scottish heritage.

It’s a Scottish tradition for good luck,” explains Fahmie. “The first foot over the threshold on New Year’s Eve is said to bring good luck.”

The homeowner believes his luck has held. “We used to live about 200 yards away from here for 12 years,” he recalls. “We must have walked by this house a thousand times and never realized what a wonderful environment was here.”

Since completing the remodel, people walking along the street have frequently stopped to offer their compliments. “They are as thrilled with how it turned out as I am,” the

owner says of the finished remodeling job. “The end result exceeded our wildest expectations.”