

OLD-FASHIONED FRIENDLINESS PERVADES EVERY CORNER OF THIS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA FAMILY'S HOME—THANKS TO VINTAGE DETAILS, ABUNDANT SUNLIGHT, AND A RELAXED ATTITUDE.

Capturing the Sunshine

BY RHODA MURPHY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JON JENSEN. PRODUCTION BY CARLA HOWARD.



Tami and Mark Becker didn't want a house that would impress their friends or even show off Mark's formidable skills as a builder and designer. For their Northern California home they simply sought a place full of sunshine and happiness where they and their four kids could feel at ease in every room. And most of all, they craved "old-fashioned Grandma warmth," Tami says. "Then people would feel instantly at home when they walked in."

She and Mark, owner of a San Francisco design/build firm, bought the Craftsman-style house six years ago when Tami was pregnant with their third child. Despite the 1915 structure's age, it didn't have much character or friendly appeal. Every ounce of charm had been removed in a botched 1950s remodel.

"There was nothing redeeming about the house on the inside, and little worth saving on the outside," Mark remembers. "It had small metal windows and fiberglass siding. The kitchen countertops were pink laminate. The layout was awful."

But Mark saw potential. "It worked well on the lot, and I knew I could make it great without changing the footprint," he says.

Tami gives a hug to her youngest (above). She chose a Dutch door for her back entrance because of the flexibility it gives. In order to infuse their kitchen with light (right), the Beckers traded upper cabinets for a wall of windows. Rather than the expected tile for the range backsplash, Mark used stainless steel stamped with a diamond pattern. Narrow shelves at the end of the island hold Tami's award-winning jams.





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TAMI BECKER



To keep the dining room (left) as inviting and useable as possible, Tami filled it with a country-style table and chairs. Mark made the custom cabinets look deliberately old with wavy glass and carved pillars. The Becker family (above) sits together on their newly installed patio.



LOOKING INTO THE NEW ENTRANCE



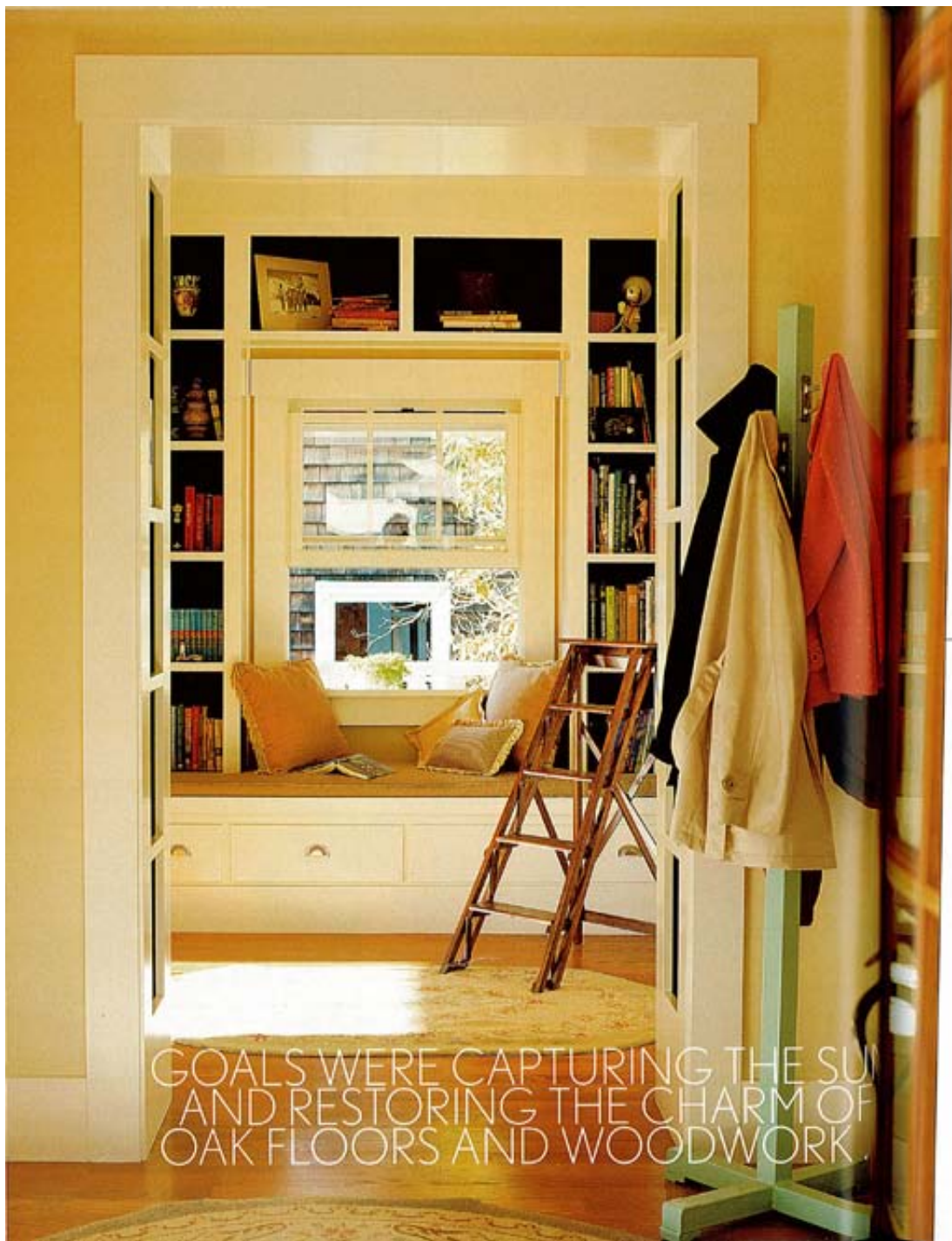
Not altering the footprint was important because the neighborhood's lots are small (this one is about $\frac{1}{3}$ of an acre) and the Beckers didn't want to go through the hassle of obtaining a variance. They also felt that with proper planning, the 4,500-square-foot home could easily accommodate their family, which includes four young children. The house's other asset was its location: It sits on a hill overlooking a quiet park with views of the city.

In fact, the couple hadn't planned on doing such a major renovation at all. But—as frequently happens in old houses—with each layer they pulled back, they discovered unpleasant surprises that needed fixing. Mark finally decided to just gut the house.

After interior walls were removed, Mark and Tami were free to reconfigure the house to get exactly what they wanted—in particular, sunshine. “We redesigned to take advantage of the house's southern exposure, and the view of the park and the backyard,” Mark says.

Sunlight pours into the living room (left) via a new broad porch (right) that replaced a 1950s-era den. Moving the entrance to the center of the house and across from where it had been gave the house symmetry and presence. During the renovation, the Beckers discovered that this is where the entry had been in 1915. The Beckers essentially flopped the floor plan (above), bringing the kitchen over to the southern side of the house.





GOALS WERE CAPTURING THE SUN
AND RESTORING THE CHARM OF
OAK FLOORS AND WOODWORK.



Rooms that the family uses most are now located on the sunny side of the house. The kitchen got the best, and roomiest, seat in the house. Because Tami loves to cook, and her family likes to be near when she does, the room is a spacious 14x17 feet. The kitchen and adjoining family room occupy one end of the house, replacing a collection of smaller rooms. Bringing light into this room was so critical to them that Mark and Tami gave up any upper cabinets for a bank of windows. "We wanted light and to look out to the park. I'd rather eat on paper plates than take away that view," Mark says.

The dining room also got a sunny perch. In many houses, dining rooms are seldom used, but the Beckers' frequently host friends and family. "This room functions terrifically for every aspect of entertaining," Mark says. "We put in French doors that open onto the covered entry porch as well as onto the patio. On nice days we open all the doors. This room is an integral part of our lifestyle."

In addition to infusing the house with light, the Beckers were determined to bring back the home's original character and give it that grandma warmth Tami wanted. On the exterior, they replaced the fiberglass wall shingles with stained cedar shakes and put in oversized, divided-light windows.

On the inside, they also were guided by what might have been. Era-appropriate oak floors run the length of the downstairs. Mark had

With its fireplace and cozy window seat, the breakfast room (above) is a space for lingering. It also serves as the link between kitchen and family room. For the decor, Tami favors rustic or easy-care pieces. Here, she pairs new black chairs with an antique oak table. The former front entrance became a welcoming but small library (opposite) with a window seat and built-in bookshelves. The library opens onto the front hall, where a reproduction coat rack stands.



An afternoon project for Mark and the kids took on a life of its own, and what was to be a simple playhouse became a mini-version of the big house, complete with shingles and trim (above). Inside, the structure has five bunks for sleepovers, along with electricity, lighting, and a tiny television/vcr. The kids decorated the walls with their art (top).

them rift-sawn to get a tighter grain and a more linear pattern. Every room was lavished with handsome woodwork. Mark advises that the secret to making a house look as if it's always been there is with the details. "We wanted it to appear as if it had never been renovated."

As warm and child-friendly as the house is, the Becker children's favorite space is in the backyard. It's an enchanting loft-style playhouse designed by Mark to resemble the main house. Sheltered by walls that they're allowed to cover with their own artwork, the Becker kids pass many of their playtime hours in this almost magical hideout.

Although much larger, the main house has the same spirit as the playhouse—both are sanctuaries where everyone who walks in feels like one of the family. ☺

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