

HOME+GARDEN  
**design**  
SUMMER 2012

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A NOD TO  
**HISTORY**



PALO ALTO COUPLE TAKES CRAFTSMAN BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL CHARM



by Carol Blitzer / photos by Dasja Dolan

**W**hen Ann and Dan Nitzan found their new Palo Alto home in 2005 it met all their key criteria: It was walking distance to downtown, not too far from Dan's 105-year-old grandfather who lives at Channing House, with a sunny garden.

They then spent a couple of years planning how to restore the 1912 Craftsman, which had been "remuddled" over the years and had even been turned into a duplex at one point.

Working with Frederic Knapp, an architect exper-

**Clockwise, from top:** The exterior of the 1912 Craftsman home is nearly the same, with a wide front door; by lopping off some added-on rooms, they were able to build a deck outside the kitchen and office; the home is filled with "old-fashioned" touches, including a rotary phone.



**From top:** Bricks from inside the original fireplace chimney were re-purposed in a walkway in the backyard; the stairwell went through numerous design iterations of its trim and paneling pattern; electrical outlets are hidden within cabinets in the master bathroom.

rienced in historical restoration whom they found through a mutual friend, they explained that they wanted a bungalow that had adequate space, charm and that represented old Palo Alto.

Several years later, after much research and consultation with their architect and contractor, Michael Meyer, the Nitzans have achieved it all. From the street their home looks much as it did in 1912. But major changes have occurred, beginning with lopping off the added-on rooms in the back, capturing the attic space and extending it a few feet in back, and adding a full basement.

The actual footprint of the house on the substandard lot is smaller than when they began, Dan says, pointing to the back porch that overlooks that sunny garden.

Every step of the process was well thought through, with an eye to salvaging and reusing original materials as much as possible. Douglas-fir flooring was removed from the old rear addition and used to patch gaps in the front; the chimney from

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**Much of the** living room is original, with the fireplace rebuilt and built-in benches at the sides. Douglas fir flooring was re-captured and re-used to patch where needed.

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the fireplace was taken down brick-by-brick, a stovepipe inserted and the chimney reconstructed. Many of those bricks reappeared in the back patio.

“We wanted to be respectful of the style and materials of the day,” Dan says. In practical terms that meant using old fixtures and fittings, plaster walls, high ceilings and salvaged materials, he adds. Many of those fixtures were found by Ann on the Internet.

Knapp describes the Nitzans as “very active clients,” noting that the stairwell went through numerous iterations before they settled on the trim and paneling pattern.

And not everything went smoothly. After the new front door was installed, Ann had buyer’s remorse, Dan says, adding that “bungalows of this era had wide doors.”

They replaced their first choice with a wide, heavy door with beveled, tempered glass panes — all

protected by an electronic lock that Dan re-engineered and reassembled.

Throughout the house, the Nitzans have added their very personal touches: Dan learned how to create leaded- and stained-glass windows. And he applied his engineering background to adapting what looks like old push-button light switches to dimmers.

The subway tile they chose for the kitchen had to be perfectly flat, rather than the rounded edges more common today. Likewise, contemporary hexagonal tile is set 1/8-inch apart — too wide by 1912 standards. So they carefully peeled each tile from the backing and re-glued them much closer together on new backing, before using them as a kitchen counter and on the bathroom floors.

Some of their materials they found on site, including an old pocket door that had been removed to make way for a wall heater. That door was restored, as well as the sideboard in the dining room.

The new kitchen is huge — 13.5 feet by 21 feet, with a lower Carrera marble countertop near the prep sink where 5-foot, 2-inch Ann can whip out pastries and a standard-height countertop made of white hexagonal tiles trimmed in shiny black that suits Dan’s 6-foot height. The counter slopes toward the sink, making cleanup easier.

All the faucets, outlet covers and drawer pulls are nickel-plated, with the refrigerator and freezer drawers hidden behind cabinetry.

Although the house was made to look old, it doesn’t lack for modern conveniences. A motion sensor automatically starts circulating hot water when someone enters the bathroom; a fan goes on when one steps into the shower; a central vacuum system is built into the walls; there’s radiant heating throughout. Most of the kitchen drawers are on slides, and most outlets are hidden inside cabinets.

While the front rooms — living room and dining room — are close to the originals, the back consists of



**Kitchen counters** were built in two heights and two materials, the shorter topped in marble ideal for Ann Nitzan's baking, the taller made of hexagonal tile. Backing is flat subway tile, trimmed in black.

the new kitchen, a bathroom and a study that overlooks the backyard. Upstairs they've added two bedrooms and a bathroom, and the basement now contains the family room/TV room/guest space, with its own bathroom, a second laundry area, Dan's workshop, much storage space as well as the guts of the house: solar water heater with a thermal pump, water filter, radiant heating and a commercial fire-alarm system.

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Provisions have been made for a future photovoltaic system.

And, although Dan concedes it could be the trick of the light, "Not a day goes by that I don't notice something pretty." **h+g**

### Resources:

*Historic preservation architect:* Frederick Knapp, Knapp Architects, San Francisco, 415-986-2327, [www.knapparchitect.com](http://www.knapparchitect.com)

*Building contractor:* Michael Meyer Fine Woodworking, Mountain View, 650-960-3447, [mmfww.com](http://mmfww.com)

*Useful websites:* Olde Good Things, [ogtstore.com](http://ogtstore.com); Gayle's Pasadena Architectural Salvage, [pasadenaarchitecturalsalvage.com](http://pasadenaarchitecturalsalvage.com); Toledo Architectural Artifacts, Inc., [coolstuffschoolstuff.com](http://coolstuffschoolstuff.com); Omega Too, Berkeley, [www.omega-too.com](http://www.omega-too.com); Dan Johnson's Antique Lighting Museum, [danjohnson.com](http://danjohnson.com); DEA Bathroom Machineries (in Murphys, Calif.), <http://deabath.com/index.html>; eBay

### Goal of project:

Add more usable space, including a workshop and home office; restore to original Craftsman charm

### Unanticipated issues:

Replaced first new front door with wider one; replaced new French stove with a BlueStar range

### Year house built:

1912, remodeled 2007-09

### Size of home, lot:

Was 1,350 sq ft; now 2,100 sq ft plus a full basement on 5,000-sq-ft lot

### Time to complete:

2 years

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