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A young couple with a growing family updates their humble house with a pitch-perfect blend of pragmatism and delight

BY LEO ARTALEJO



Bungalow Comb-over

When our first child arrived, my wife and I quickly realized that our family was outgrowing our little house. The idea for remodeling popped up one night while having dinner with our neighbors. They had recently added a second story to their house, and survived. We loved our neighborhood, but we couldn't say the same for our 1942 war box.

We knew we needed more space in the long term, but we weren't sure how to get it. We

talked with our neighbors in depth about the pains and pleasures of remodeling, and they sent us home that night with a stack of *Fine Homebuilding* magazines. We found an article in the summer 2005 *Houses* issue entitled "From Brick Ranch to Bungalow," which excited us because the house had been wrapped in what we referred to as a bungalow-roof "comb-over." The article featured a fairly nondescript house that had been completely transformed into a bungalow with

Before and after. The low-slung bungalow-style roof keeps the front of the house in scale with the rest of the neighborhood. Stucco piers and fiber-cement lap siding are topped with cedar posts and shingle accents. A welcoming porch leads to a front door that now opens into a vestibule. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

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Inset photo: Tim Hammer, courtesy of CAST architecture

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FIXING THE BOTTLENECK

The front door to the original house entered into the living room/dining room at the intersection of the doorway to the kitchen. A new entry into a small vestibule eliminates the old arrangement. On the second floor, a family room with a couch, a computer station, and a shelf full of toys overlooks the dining area and rock garden. Two-ft. cantilevers beyond the downstairs wall provide enough extra room for a bathtub in the kids' bathroom and a little more space in the master bedroom.



Second floor



First floor

SPECS

- Bedrooms: 4
- Bathrooms: 3
- Size: 2294 sq. ft.
- Cost: \$224 per sq. ft. (doesn't include owner's labor)
- Completed: 2008
- Location: Seattle
- Architect: CAST architecture; Tim Hammer, project architect
- Builder: Zoltan Farkas

0 2 4 8 ft.

Photos taken at lettered positions.

great curb appeal. Maybe it was possible to stay in our neighborhood, keep the good parts of our existing house, and add some missing elements.

Our design process started with an empty photo album and a stack of shelter magazines. My wife and I would open a bottle of wine and start pasting in clippings of rooms and details that we liked. We also kept notes

on things that we didn't like. This process equipped us with a visual language that allowed us to engage architects and builders in initial conversations.

After interviewing three different architects and whose Web sites appealed to us, we settled on a small boutique outfit in Seattle called CAST architecture. We were impressed with

New meets old at the post passageway. Spruced up with fir trim, the old living room is separated from the new entry by a bench in the foyer, a display cabinet, and a low soffit. Long diagonal views, such as the glimpse of the kitchen from the living room, occur from several vantage points. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

their ability to balance contemporary uses of space, light, and materials in traditional houses. Our conversations were quickly distilled into four guiding principles that would inform the design of our home:

- Reconfigure and expand while staying in scale with the rest of the neighborhood.
- Orient the house toward the landscape to connect the living spaces with the yard.



No turning back. The southern half of the original house (photo below) contained the living room, a bedroom, and a small bath that were worth keeping. But the northern half had to go to make room for an open kitchen and dining area. The revitalized living room (photo left) overlooks the new spaces. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



SPLURGING WHERE IT COUNTS

Although we were working within the original footprint of the house and keeping room sizes fairly modest, there were several places where we were willing to break the bank a bit to make the house memorable and inspiring to live in.



A two-story space

Two of our guiding principles were to foster connections between the public parts of the house and to maximize natural light. When the architect suggested having a double-height ceiling above the dining room, we were hesitant to give up what was essentially an upstairs bedroom. Going with this design, however, proved to be a defining feature of our new home. The double-height space with its transom windows allows for ample light and views, which can be appreciated from both floors. It also allows for easy communication in the public spaces of the home.

Rock garden

Because we were reorienting the house toward the backyard, we decided to take advantage of the slope and create a rock garden. Boulders aren't cheap, and they require impressive machinery to deliver and move into position. So one of the first things we did once the north half of the house had been carted away was to use the wide-open access to the yard to bring in the boulders. Cost of boulders and the labor to install them: \$14,000



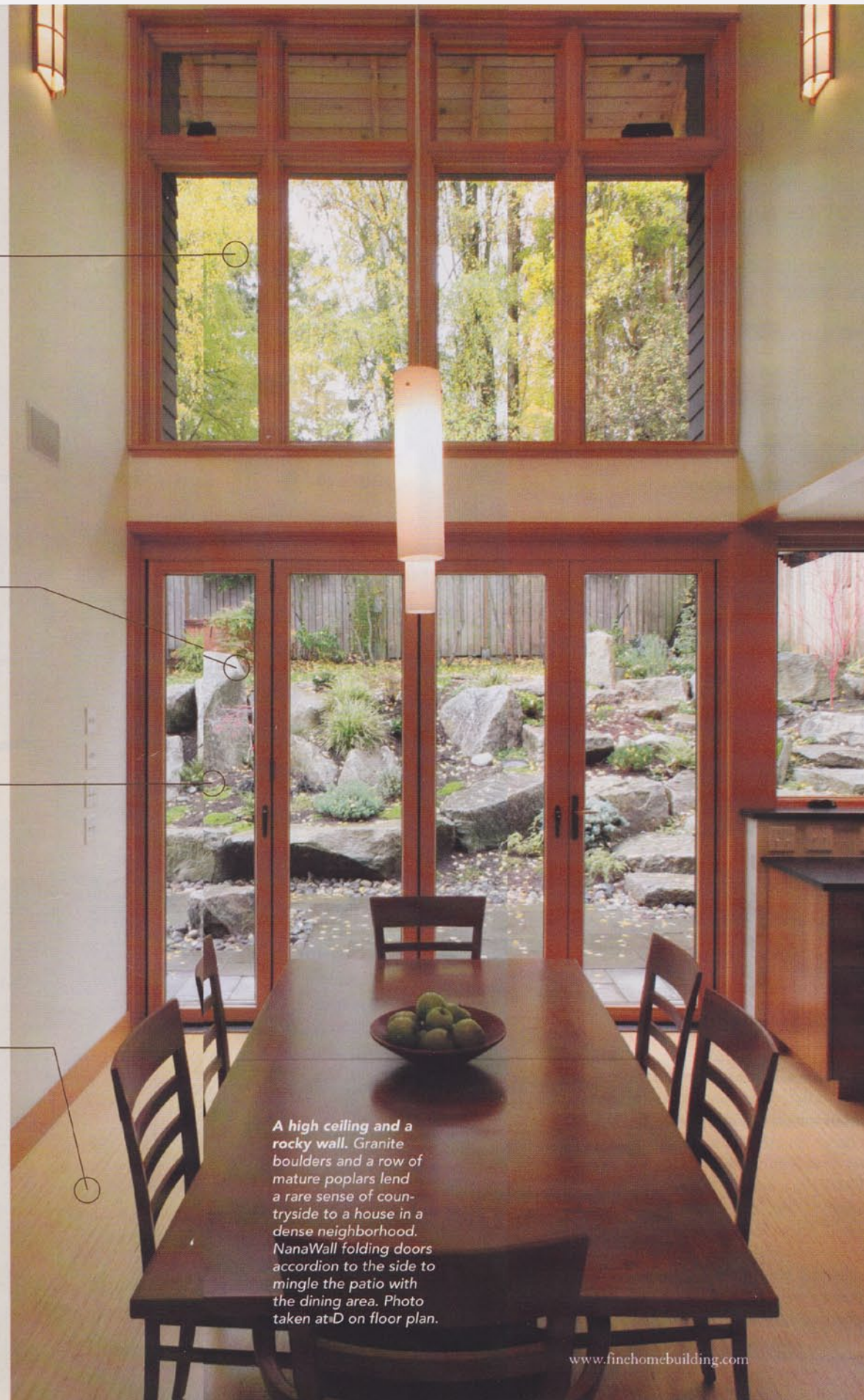
Foldaway doors

To take full advantage of this rock garden, we wanted to be able to open the house to the outdoors and to let the patio mingle with the kitchen and dining area. To that end, we sprung for a 10-ft.-wide, four-door unit from NanaWall. On warm, sunny days, it's a joy to fold open these doors and live in our own little campsite with the kids doing a tricycle slalom around the patio.

Cost of folding doors plus installation: \$13,000

Radiant floors

We'd heard good things about radiant-floor heat. Because we were replacing a significant part of the existing subfloor and would be building an entirely new second story, we were pleased to discover an efficient radiant subflooring called Warmboard. It's an aluminum-sheathed, pregrooved plywood panel that serves as both subfloor and heat radiator. The grooves are fitted with PEX tubing to route the hot water through the floors. For the part of the house that we were keeping, we chose to do a staple-up installation of PEX tubing under the existing subfloor. While not as efficient as the Warmboard, this hybrid solution allowed us to use one boiler to heat the whole house. Cost of Warmboard, PEX, and boiler: roughly \$16 per sq. ft.



A high ceiling and a rocky wall. Granite boulders and a row of mature poplars lend a rare sense of countryside to a house in a dense neighborhood. NanaWall folding doors accordion to the side to mingle the patio with the dining area. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

- Maximize natural light to help offset the gray days of a Seattle winter.
- Focus on energy conservation, efficient use of space, and natural materials.

What to keep? What to toss?

We liked some parts of the original house and, for both financial and environmental reasons, wanted to keep them. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that the foundation was sturdy enough to carry a second story. We were happy with the size of the bedrooms, the hardwood floors, the layout of the bathroom, and the fireplace in the living room. But we wanted the new spaces to emphasize big changes, such as combining the new kitchen with the dining and living area for long diagonal views.

The reconfigured plan retains the southern half of the original house and radically rearranges the northern half (floor plans, p. 44). What used to be the back of the extradeep garage became space for a new kitchen. We made up for the annexed garage territory by pushing it 8 ft. toward the street to the setback line. The front door, which used to open unceremoniously into the living room, now leads from the side of a small

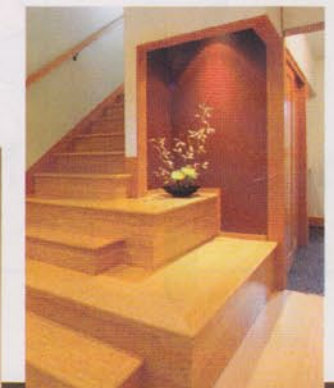
porch into an entry that includes an art niche, a closet, and a small bench.

At the center of the house, a two-story-tall window wall takes advantage of one of our favorite things: our secluded backyard. This orientation brings in light and highlights a connection with nature that can be seen from multiple vantage points.

Rooms to let the good times roll

One of the things I love about our neighborhood is the wine-making club. Every fall, we buy a load of grapes from Washington State vineyards, divvy up the juice, and bottle the resulting wines. As soon as I had space in the new garage, I put up a batch of Remodel Red (photo p. 44). Like the house, the wine was a big hit at the party we had for the builders and architects. □

Leo Artalejo is a communications consultant, a remodel junkie, and an amateur winemaker. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.



Cool details

In the corner of the kitchen, a handy desk for a laptop floats above a window with a view of the black bamboo outside. The window above the desk is frosted, to let in light and maintain privacy from the house a few feet away. The bamboo peekaboo continues through the clear window at top. At the base of the stairs, a tokonoma-style alcove provides a place for artistic display adjacent to the busy crossroads of the house. Photos taken at E and F on floor plan.

