

SPACES

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY



In Mill Valley, a home is remodeled to roll out the welcome mat for family, friends and neighbors.

BY LOTUS ABRAMS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS KUOH



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The playroom is outfitted with custom storage space for books and toys, a vintage craft table, stackable Blu Dot stools, a Bernhardt Design chair, Visual Comfort Lighting and a print by Sausalito artist Eric Zener.



Left: The home's design blends traditional and modern elements with a bold yellow and blue color scheme.

Below: A pool table converts to a dining table when needed for occasional formal entertaining.

THESE DAYS, SUBURBAN HOME DESIGN tends to prioritize privacy and single-function spaces. A Mill Valley residence recently remodeled for a family of six with deep roots in Marin, however, turns the typical model on its ear, guided by the homeowners' open-door approach to socializing and casual everyday lifestyle. To that end, the driveway is used for neighborhood basketball games rather than parking cars; the front yard features a firepit instead of fences and gates; the living room serves as both a library and a TV room; and the dining room is used more often for playing pool than for hosting formal gatherings.

Before interior design firm Mansfield + O'Neil and architect John Lum helped the owners renovate this five-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath house, built in 2006, its design did little to meet the family's needs. By appearances, the home was fairly nondescript, save one defining feature: It was surrounded by covered porches on all four sides that served little purpose other than to block sunlight from reaching the interior. The closed-off living room and dining room were gathering dust, while the family's daily activities were constrained to the kitchen and a small, adjacent den with limited backyard access. An oversized pantry was monopolizing valuable space in the center of the house, and nearly everyone used the garage as the primary entrance, leaving the hallway constantly littered with shoes, sports equipment and backpacks.

Even after several years of living in a house that clearly didn't work for the family, however, it wasn't any of these problems that finally prompted the wife, a scientist and an avid reader, to place a call to interior design firm Mansfield + O'Neil; she needed help



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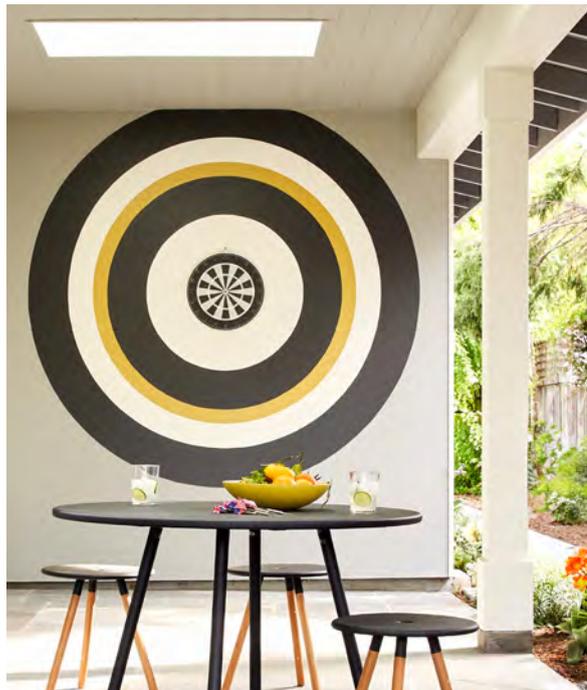
figuring out what to do with the family's massive collection of thousands of books. "She wanted to know if we could put bookshelves in the living room, since they never used it anyway," says Lisa O'Neil, a principal designer at Mansfield + O'Neil, which has offices in Mill Valley and on the Peninsula. "I told her we could do that, but it wouldn't solve the other problems they were having with the house. That got the ball rolling, which turned into a snowball that ultimately resulted in a full gut remodel."

O'Neil knew they would need an architect at this point, so together with Lum and builder Barker O'Donoghue, the team dove into the project. "One challenge was to find a way to add more square footage while being restricted by the planning code," says Lum, whose namesake firm is based in San Francisco. "There were so many porches, so we thought, why don't we fill them in?"

By strategically incorporating portions of the porches and reducing the size of the garage, Lum was able to add about 700 square feet of space and reprogram the first floor, which now features a breakfast nook in the enlarged and reconfigured kitchen, an office, a larger bedroom and en suite bathroom for the family's eldest son and a mudroom at the entrance to the house. He also opened the floorplan by relocating the powder room and replacing the large pantry with a smaller pedestal wall. In the living room, he moved the fireplace, enabling the team to install a wall of French doors opening to the side porch, and he reconfigured the stairway to allow more space for the closet upstairs in the primary suite, which was completely remodeled. In addition, the team installed 12 new skylights that flood the home and remaining covered porch areas with sunlight.

With the floorplan much improved, O'Neil set to work on maximizing the functionality of the spaces as well as enhancing the aesthetic with a blend of traditional and contemporary design. New casework and trim impart the architecturally neutral interiors with the traditional sensibility the homeowners' favor, while a bold palette of blues, yellows and oranges add contemporary flair to the furniture and finishes. "With every decision, we thought about how to make the design both pragmatic and elevated," O'Neil says.

A prime example of this approach is the new mudroom, where practical features like a built-in bench and a much-needed wall of cabinetry are enlivened by the graphic porcelain Bedrosians tile flooring and chartreuse and blue color scheme. "This is the first room you see when you come in the front door, so it really did have to be both functional and beautiful," O'Neil says. A window in the far wall also allows light to pass into the living room.



Clockwise, from top: Kitchen design elements include dolomite countertops, a Global Tile Design tile backsplash, Visual Comfort pendant lights and custom cabinetry; family meals typically take place at the new eat-in dining nook; the new entryway merges functionality and style; the side porch welcomes friends to drop by for a game of darts.





No longer a neglected space, the combined living room and dining area is now a hub of family activity. Outfitted for both reading sessions and movie nights, the living room houses the wife's many books in a new built-in library wall, painted in a brilliant blue hue, as well as the home's only TV, hung above the marble-clad fireplace flanked by additional cabinetry with perforated metal inserts. The focal point of the adjacent dining area, meanwhile, is the streamlined pool table, which cleverly converts into a dining table when needed for formal entertaining. The new pedestal wall features double-sided storage, with a bar on the dining side and a pantry on the opposite kitchen and family room side. "One of the concerns we had was how to make sure that all of the real estate in the house is used by all members of the family," O'Neil says. "The draw of this space is that now it's truly multifunctional."

The kitchen features a large, sunny eat-in dining nook with a custom built-in banquette, where the family eats most meals. A large island, dark dolomite countertops, Global Tile Design tile backsplash, Visual Comfort pendant lights and white custom cabinetry complete the design.

The family room continues the home's cheery signature color palette and is contiguous with the kitchen and playroom, which can be cordoned off with accordion doors. Furnished with a vintage craft table, the playroom offers plenty of built-in storage for the kids' own large collection of books and, along with many other pieces by local artists in the house, notably features a print by Sausalito artist Eric Zener. Improving access to the outdoors, both rooms are accessible to the backyard's dining and lounging area, as well as a new sport court, via large sliding glass doors.

Outside, it's the front yard, however, that really reflects the family's community-oriented lifestyle. Along with the firepit, the setting for many predinner happy hour sessions, the open side porch welcomes friends and neighbors to drop by for a game of darts or a ping-pong match set against a striking yellow-and-black painted graphic backdrop.

"The driving concept of this project was to allow for the flow of friends and family in and out, which I think is becoming an increasingly rare way of living away with so many new or renovated homes surrounded by fences and gates," O'Neil says. "In the end, what we've achieved here is not only proper housing for a full library of books for both the mom and the kids, but also a way to live that's more conducive to this family's everyday activities and community-focused lifestyle."