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MAY 2005

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AOL KEYWORD: SUNSET

\$4.99US \$6.50CAN



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## Rethinking the classic bungalow

A Portland couple achieves a graceful evolution

BY JIL PETERS  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA ROMEREIN

**All over the West**, homeowners are renovating old bungalows. Some meticulously mimic the original architecture; others create strikingly contemporary additions, sharply contrasting old and new. Architects Joann Le and David Horsley, a Portland couple, chose yet another approach. “We treated the renovation with a subtle touch that imbued a modern sensibility while respecting the home’s character,” says Horsley. And perhaps most important, they kept a good sense of humor along the way.

“With two architects in the house, there was no restraining voice of reason,” laughs Horsley. “We turned a little fixer into a significant fixer.” The couple has spent the last six years gradually transforming their 1913 bungalow from a collection of small, dark rooms to an open, airy, light-filled home. They did almost all of the work themselves—even making much of the furniture. “We certainly wish we had bought stock in Home Depot,” says Le.

One of their first decisions was to remove a wall that divided a small kitchen and a tiny downstairs bedroom. Horsley had fond memories of the large kitchen and eating area in his grandmother’s home, and he and Le wanted a similarly gracious space. “We use the kitchen in a modern way,” explains Le. “We cook, eat, do the bills, and read the paper there.” By opening up the room with large double-hung windows and a glass door, they gained access to sunlight and views.

Key to the success of the kitchen is a new rear porch that

**For their front porch (above left), Joann Le and David Horsley designed double wood columns to reduce the mass and add detailing. At the rear (above right), they built seating into the railing.**





**"We use the kitchen in a modern way. We cook, eat, do the bills, and read the paper there"**

expands the area into the backyard. The couple finished it with the same fir flooring used inside, protecting the exposed section with spar urethane, a marine-grade finish available at most paint and hardware stores. To ensure that the porch ceiling wouldn't block light to the kitchen, Le and Horsley designed skylights between the rafters, giving them the best of both worlds. A series of openings in the interior walls lets in additional sunlight. "We're not sun worshippers or even beach people," Le says with a smile, "but capturing the light is really important to us."

To achieve the same goals on the second floor, the couple added a shed dormer to the rear of the house—giving them more light and garden views while enlarging bedrooms and

creating space for an upstairs bathroom. To complete the dormer, which involved removing half the roof, they took several days off from work. "We lived in the front while the back of the house was a convertible," says Horsley.

They can laugh now, but with a Northwest fall quickly approaching, the pressure to complete the dormer was intense. "In one weekend, Joann and I ripped off the roof and did the demo work," says Horsley. The house sat exposed to the elements for a week. The following weekend, the couple—along with a few friends and a builder they hired to work alongside them—framed the walls and put up some beams. Two days later, they finished the rafters, and in another two days they had a roof again. ▶ 104

**Le and Horsley made several pieces of furniture themselves, such as the sideboard near the kitchen table. "Pretty much whenever we needed to make a piece of furniture, we signed up for a shop class," says Horsley.**



AFTER

BEFORE



## Remodel strategies

Joann Le and David Horsley applied several key principles throughout the makeover.

■ **Combine sense and sensibility.** The couple used utilitarian, almost Shaker-like detailing to bridge their modernist bent and the home's existing character. The resulting changes remain respectful to the design of the original home.

■ **Aim for sustainability.** "For both cost reasons and a desire to be sustainable, we reused a lot of materials from the house and augmented with recycled products," says Le. Reclaimed flooring from old schoolhouses, vintage door hardware, and salvaged lighting fixtures "give the renovated areas a patina of age that blends more seamlessly with the old."

■ **Unify and brighten.** White walls and fir floors provide continuity between the spaces. "We chose white because it has a lot of reflectivity, and we wanted to maximize the light as much as possible," explains Le.



In the backyard, a rectangle of grass—which our friends refer to as surreal—occupies the center. "We like having a slash of green that you see from the inside," says Le. The grass is surrounded with concrete pavers in various sizes that Horsley set in sand in a repeating geometric pattern. Running the length of the backyard is an elevated planting area, which the couple filled with woodland plants—vine maples,

hellebores, and maidenhair ferns.

Though Le and Horsley feel that the results have been more than worth it, they are the first to admit that doing a major portion of the work on their own was grueling. "In those moments," says Le, "we took solace from an old Japanese proverb: House done, life over."

**DESIGN:** Joann Le and David Horsley, DAO Architecture, Portland (503/230-0664) ▶ 106

**The biggest changes to the home are visible at the rear, where a new wide dormer rises above a skylit porch. Concrete pavers edge the patch of grass like a painting's frame.**



## Makeover details

■ **The home office** occupies part of the wide dormer (A), with a built-in desk and open storage compartments running under the long band of windows.

■ **The kitchen cabinets** (B) are white plywood boxes with fir veneer plywood doors. The countertop material is Durat ([www.durat.com](http://www.durat.com)), a Finnish product made with 50 percent recycled plastic.

■ **The built-in seating** on the back porch (C) eliminates the need for a railing and gives the porch an uncluttered look. "Plus, if you can sit on the rail, it makes the porch that much larger," says Horsley.

■ **The master bedroom** (D) shares the dormer with the home office; an interior window and door allow each space to borrow light from the other.

■ **The kitchen opens to the porch** (E) and is roomy enough for a large table. The table legs are painted white to match the walls, ceiling, and cabinet trim.

■ **The horizontal front porch railing** (F) extends down the stairway and contrasts handsomely with the honey-toned wood of the flooring. "The railing is an extension of what we have done in and around the house: simple designs that have clean lines and are easy to build," says Le. ✪

