

# From Small to Big Enough

A worker's bungalow expands to meet contemporary needs without losing its charm



BY BILL MASTIN

**T**his modest California bungalow served its present owners, a photographer and a general contractor, quite well for more than 10 years. They added a small darkroom and a home office at the basement level, and replaced the home's aging board-and-batten siding with cedar shingles, turning it into a little cousin to the famous "Berkeley brown shingles" across town.

As their two daughters grew up, however, Bill Jetton and Janet Delaney's cozy two-bedroom house began to feel cramped. The teenagers could no longer share a bedroom, Janet needed proper studio space for her growing photography career, and everyone wanted a second bathroom. Their search for a bigger house began during the Bay Area's merciless dot-com bubble.

Janet and Bill spent a frustrating two years looking for a reasonably located and big-enough place; charm became optional. Potential buyers crowded Sunday open houses, reeling at

**Keep the profile low on the street side.** With a charming porch setting the tone, the new second story repeats its gable shape with a dormer that contains the master bedroom. Photos taken at A on floor plan.





**Before**

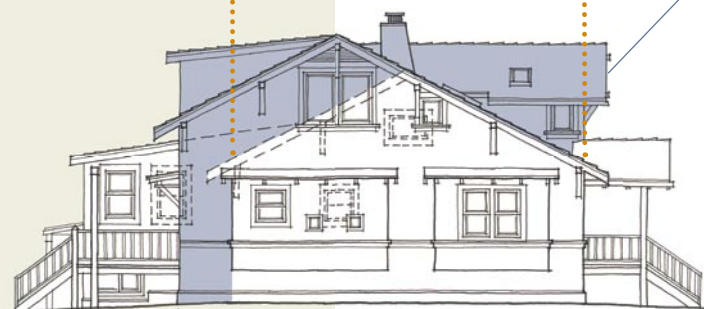
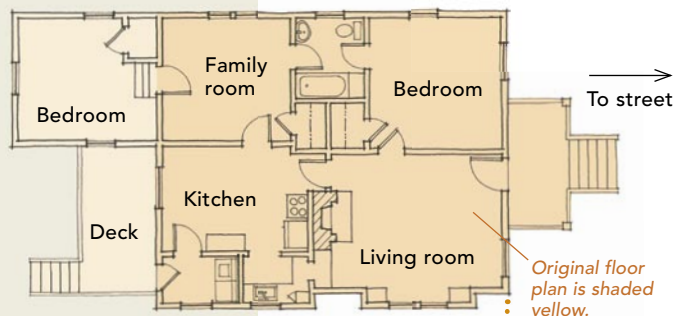
## HOUSE GROWS TOWARD THE BACK

Simple in plan and modest in amenities, the original house was virtually intact. The only changes (by previous owners) had been the addition of another bedroom in the back and a deck off the kitchen. Now, the newly remodeled house includes a second-floor bedroom, bath, and studio, along with an expanded kitchen and a carefully revised deck. Moving the ridge toward the backyard and placing a high, shed-style dormer for the studio behind it kept the bulk of the upstairs addition largely hidden from view. Photos taken at B on floor plan.

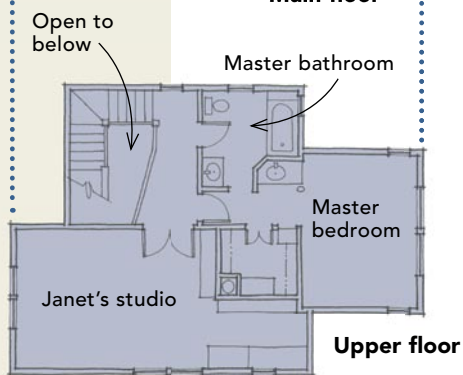
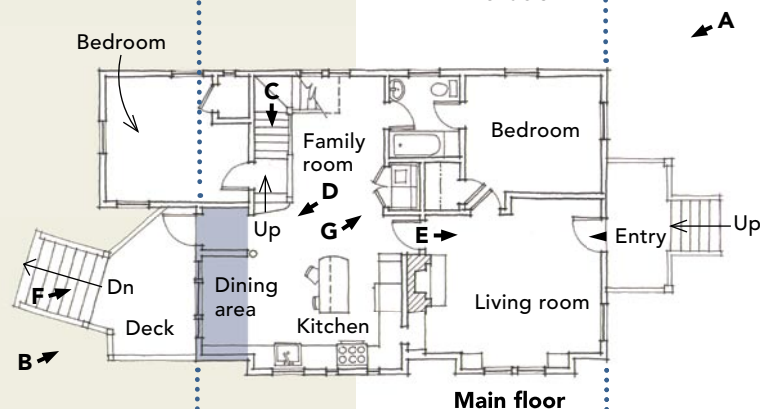
Photos taken at lettered positions.



**After**



**Elevation**

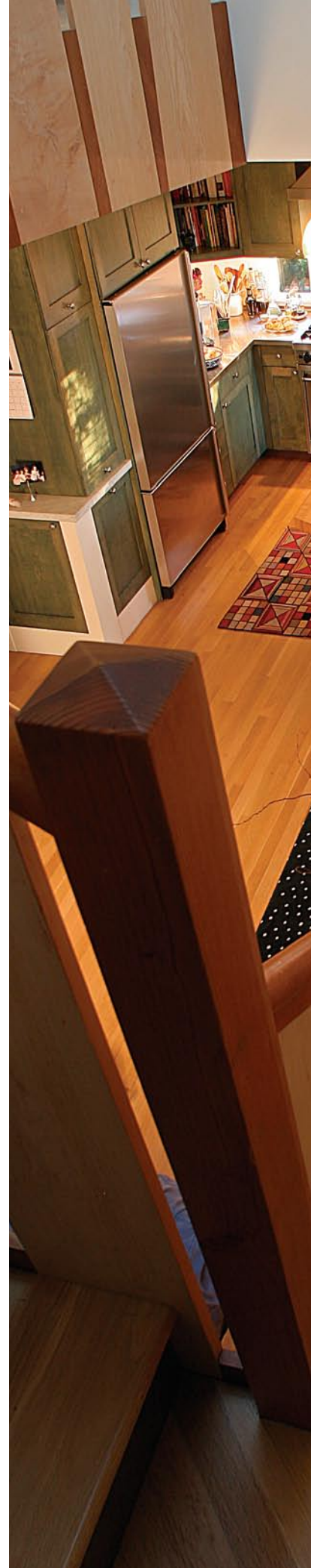


North 0 2 4 8 ft.

### SPECS

**Bedrooms:** 3  
**Baths:** 2 + a bedroom lavatory  
**Size before:** 1077 sq. ft.  
**Size after:** 1967 sq. ft.  
**Builder:** Jetton Construction Inc.

**Cost:** \$198 per sq. ft. (includes both new and remodeled space)  
**Completed:** 2001  
**Location:** Berkeley, Calif.  
**Architect:** Bill Mastin







**A sculptural stair overlooks the action.** Crafted of maple and cherry, some of the stair's balusters are tapered slightly and of random width, suggesting their forest silhouettes. The kitchen island is on wheels, allowing it to be rolled out of the way for big dinner parties. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



**Five feet that made a big difference.** Bumping out the back wall 5 ft. made room for the dining table. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

inflated prices. The search was draining, and the numbers never really added up in favor of moving. The houses for sale, though larger than the bungalow, all seemed to have flaws in their layout, and many needed extensive structural or finish work.

While the work Bill and Janet had done on their house—new foundation, shingles, and basement space—would be attractive to buyers, they likely wouldn't recoup what they had put in. And the kitchen still had its original plan, which was not up to current standards. What to do? It was time to assess the potential for enlarging their little bungalow.

Because we were old friends, I was familiar with Bill and Janet's house. Having attended many birthdays and holiday celebrations, I knew the kitchen's flaws firsthand. I had worked with Bill on residential projects over the years, so I also knew the many building skills he and his team could put into action. Here was a rare opportunity

to help good friends make the place they loved grow to serve their evolving needs.

At the end of an otherwise functional list, Janet added: "Don't forget to have fun."

### **The floor plan was perfect—for 1910**

When we pondered the house's next chapter, we all agreed the bungalow had a homey, sheltering quality and a simplicity in its basic layout that were worth keeping. It was built in 1910, just a few years after Berkeley booster and poet Charles Keeler wrote *The Simple Home*. He advocated a home where "...all is quiet in effect, restrained in tone, yet natural and joyous in its frank use of unadorned material." Good advice. We mused about what natural touches we might bring to the design.

Bill and Janet had heard their house described as a "worker's bungalow." It was affordable partly because of what was omitted. The house had a welcoming little front porch but no foyer. A



## To improve circulation, take a bite out of the bedroom



Before



After

*Carving out a slice of the adjacent bedroom made an alcove for the piano, a place to hang coats, and a much clearer path to the front door. In the bedroom, the alcove's ceiling is a storage shelf. Photos taken at E on floor plan.*

table at the back kitchen window had a view of the garden, but there was no dining room. Passage to the front and rear bedrooms was directly through the small living room and kitchen because there was no central hallway. Between the bedrooms, the lone bathroom had a door into each but no link to the other living areas. These three features—foyer, dining room, and central hallway—are typical in the many Craftsman-inspired bungalows around the Berkeley area. As we started to enlarge the house, we felt their absence.

### First, improve circulation

The original kitchen plan was a chopped-up jumble of three small rooms: one for the sink; one for the laundry and the back entry; and one for the stove, refrigerator, and table, with almost no usable counter space. But the plan's main flaw was poor circulation. The diagonal route disrupted cooking and dining, and it made laundry and outdoor access difficult. Entertaining could be a bruising affair. Thus, getting a straighter route established from the front door through the house to the backyard became a key organizational idea (floor plans, p. 96).

The first move was to get the piano out of the way of the front door (photos left). A slice of space taken from the front bedroom resulted in an alcove for the piano and for coats. While not a foyer, it helped with traffic flow and added charm to the living room.

The old house did have a usable attic, with storage space and a roof steep enough for moving around easily. By pushing back the ridge, we exploited this volume for a new second floor, without adding much height or apparent bulk. The new upstairs became the parents' realm.

Our first instinct had the master bedroom facing the quieter back garden, and Janet's studio on the street. These locations switched early, though, because we decided it was essential to maintain the house's 1½-story appearance from the street. A cozy master bedroom could be shaped with a gable dormer and take its detailing cues from the original house. In the back, the studio's larger shed dormer could lift up for its needed volume, without the low-slope, torch-down roof becoming a dominant element from the street. Because of its door arrangement, the new upstairs bath serves as a master bath that also can be used by the rest of the household. A small vanity sink in the master bedroom takes the pressure off the bathroom at rush hour.

By selectively removing walls on the main floor, we opened space for a stairway that overlooks the new center of the house. A former closet became the laundry, with storage above and shelves attached to the doors.

### This island can float out of the way

The old kitchen was just too small, so we expanded it by pushing the west wall 5 ft. toward the backyard. Now there's space for pull-out pantry cabinets and a dining table with a garden view. This move also made room for an island and a couple of stools. The island is on wheels (with brakes!), so on special occasions, the kitchen can be transformed into a festive mead-hall with sit-down dinner space for 20 people.

### Secrets of a great outdoor room on a small lot

Elevated to catch the sun, the new deck takes its shape from the views it either protects or

enhances. The deck is oriented so that it deflects stair traffic away from the bedroom window adjacent to the back door while also giving some breathing room to the ground-floor window below. The nearly 7-ft.-wide steps provide a sitting perch with a view that's angled away from a nearby storage shed and toward the flower beds in the far corner of the garden.

The new deck is about the same size as the old, but this one has a built-in bench. A timber-frame trellis with beefy 6x6 masts defines the corner of this outdoor room and anchors one end of the clothesline. The windows next to the breakfast table turn into pass-throughs when the grill is fired up.

Screening with greenery can make a small urban lot feel more private. Here, it also provides shade and helps to define garden pathways. Cables bring climbing vines up the south wall, where they provide filtered light for Janet's studio. A spectacular climbing rose survived construction and is now a flowery cape that wraps around the path leading to Bill's basement office. □

Bill Mastin is an architect based in Oakland, Calif. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.





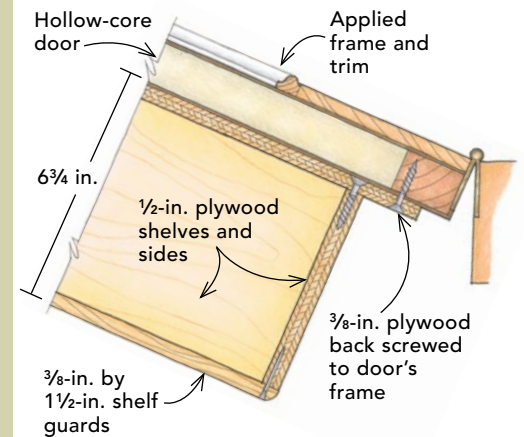


## GREAT IDEA



### LAUNDRY IN A BOX

A washer and dryer, elevated for easier accessibility, reside in a former closet. Shelves hang on the inside of the flush hollow-core plywood doors, which are stiff enough to take the extra weight. Faux frames applied to the outside of the doors give them the frame-and-panel look of the original doors. Photos taken at G on floor plan.



**Corner table, sunshine if possible.** A little deck, elevated above grade enough to make the most of the sunlight, is framed by a built-in bench and a beefy red-cedar mast that anchors one end of a clothesline. Photo above taken at F on floor plan; inset taken from studio window.