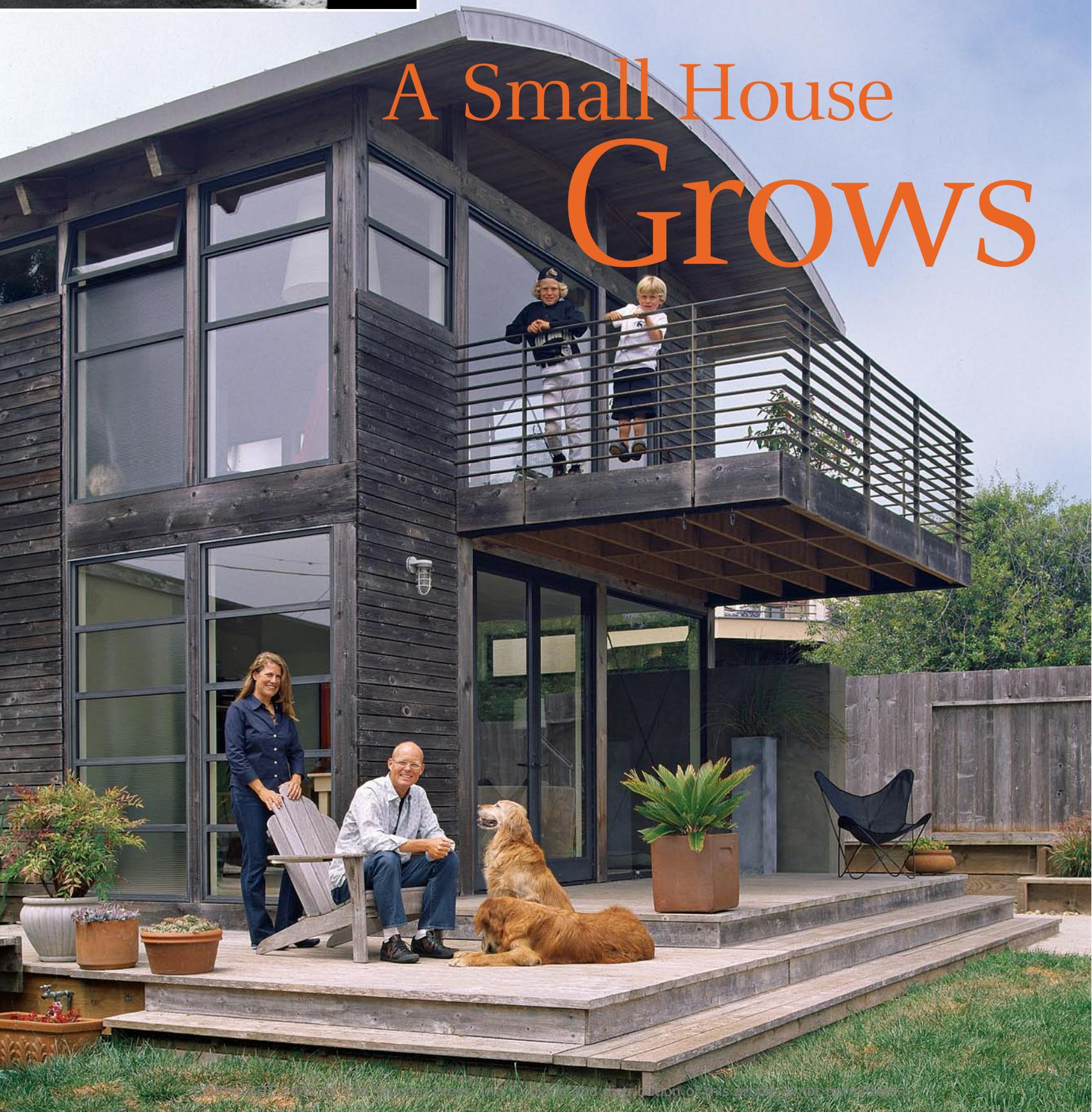




BEFORE

A Small House GROWS



A modern remodel takes shape on the California coast
—with light, views, privacy, and budget in mind

BY MICHELLE LEISE

Up and Out

For years, the small 1950s house in the California seaside town of Moss Beach suited Erik and Tena Watts just fine. With one young son, the couple lived in every bit of the 1,300-square-foot, two-bedroom house sitting just two blocks from the ocean, an hour south of San Francisco. When they bought the house, in 1991, it was one of many modest, unassuming homes in the neighborhood. But before long, the neighbors started adding on. All around town, houses were getting larger, and massive remodels were encroaching on the couple's treasured views, light, and privacy.

By 1998, when the couple learned they were expecting another child, their house no longer seemed big enough. They thought about moving, but they loved the location and the overall feel of their home, so they asked a friend, architect David Darling of Aidlin Darling Design, in San Francisco, to draw up plans for a remodel. Says Erik: "All of his designs are custom and unique, but he's also totally aware of budget—and we needed to do this as economically as possible."

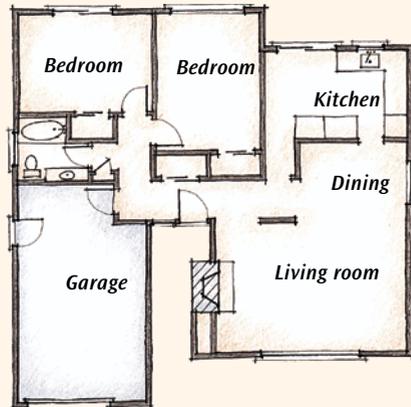
At the time, the Moss Beach area was going through a housing boom, so labor was expensive and hard to find. But the couple discovered that by hiring tradespeople they knew who would work for reasonable fees, and by



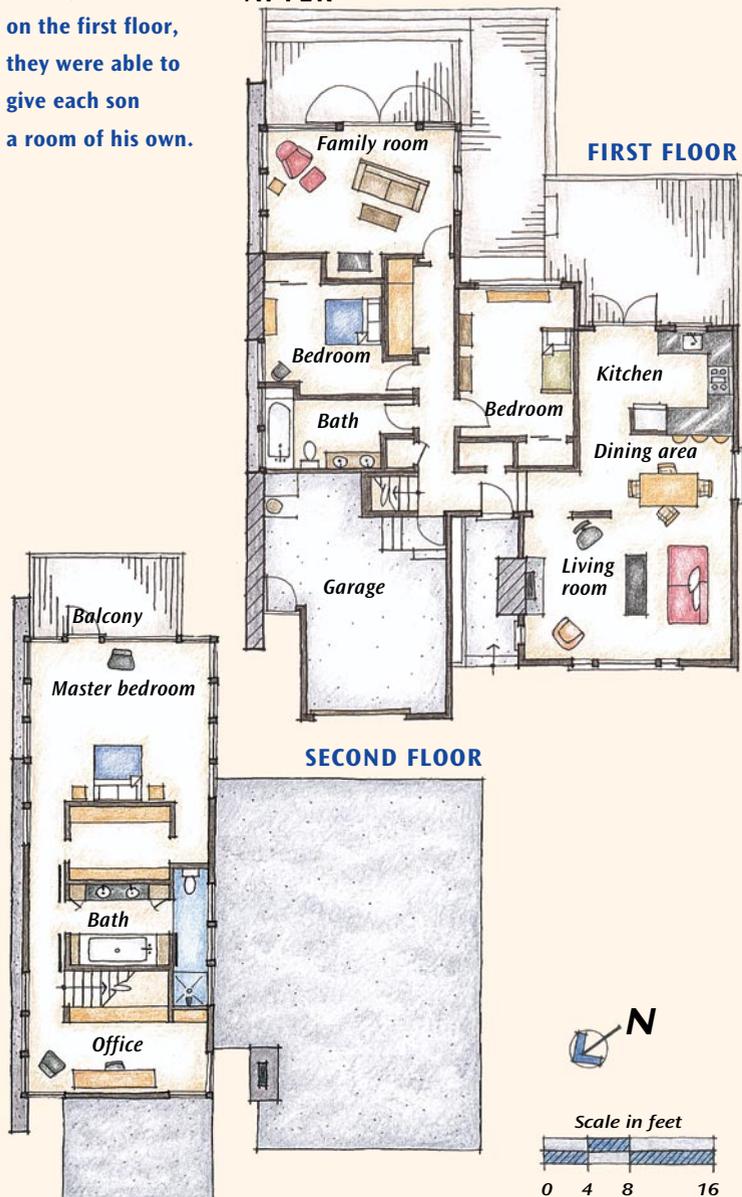
Doubling up

The Wattses' house went from a tight 1,300 square feet to 2,400 square feet. By adding a second story, they were able to create two distinct spaces upstairs: a master suite and an office. And by freeing up space on the first floor, they were able to give each son a room of his own.

BEFORE



AFTER



asking their architect to focus on cost-saving measures, they could remodel for around the same price as moving. So they decided to stay put.

Adding on by going out—and up

The Wattses and their architect all lean toward a modern, semi-industrial home style, so they didn't spend much time discussing aesthetics. Instead they talked about how the materials, windows, and floor plan could work together to fulfill the family's needs and fit in with their eclectic neighborhood. "There are large two-story houses and also smaller bungalows in the neighborhood," Darling says. "I tried to get a form that married both."

First Darling and his partner, Joshua Aidlin, studied the house's advantages and disadvantages. In the back, the house looked out onto six acres of green space, a definite benefit in a dense neighborhood. To the left and right, however, large houses towered over it, often giving the Wattses a closed-in feeling. To add room, maximize natural light, and minimize the impact of the neighboring houses, Darling designed an addition that incorporated part of the original house as well as some yard space from the east and south sides of the garage (see site plan, facing page). The new, two-story, 1,100-square-foot rectangle includes a ground-level family room, bathroom, and bedroom, and an upper-level loft-like master bedroom, bath, and office. But this isn't just any rectangular addition. A barrel-vaulted roof, an interior/exterior cement plaster wall, natural siding, and creative window solutions give the home a distinctive look.

The Wattses wanted to use materials native to the coastal environment, so Darling showed them photographs of nautical images, such as lighthouses and seaside shacks, to inspire them. Those maritime ideas influenced the design, especially that of the roof. Its Alaskan yellow-cedar beams—both weather resistant and naturally beautiful—are supported by curved, laminated beams that resemble the ribs of a boat. "I liked juxtaposing the curved form of the roof with the boxy geometry of the addition," Darling says. While the curved roof was more expensive than a conventional one, all the laminated beams were designed to be the same length and shape so Darling had to order only one custom form.



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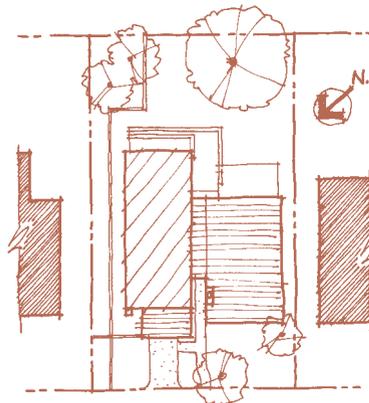
UNDER A BARREL ROOF

Open beams and rough walls give the second-floor master suite a cool, contemporary feel. Light pours in from reeded-glass clerestory panels, from stacked, commercial-style windows, and below, from the bedroom balcony.



NOT YOUR EVERYDAY ADDITION

Architect David Darling borrowed some space from the backyard but mostly went up in designing the Wattses' addition. The model, below left, shows how the barrel roof and cement plaster wall make the house stand out. The site plan shows neighboring houses (shaded) and why privacy was so important to the homeowners.



Which addition is right for you?

Erik and Tena Watts built both up and out, but most of the time, one option is preferred over the other. Before you plan an addition, consider whether it makes more sense to spread out or to add a second story to the existing footprint of your home. Here are some considerations.

- **Study the amenities of your house and property.** If you want to take advantage of a great view, it may be better to build atop your existing house. If you have a sprawling yard, you may want to add onto the house's footprint.
- **Be sensitive to your neighborhood's appearance.** Do all you can to build something that will fit in well and not be obtrusive.
- **Compare costs.** Generally, it costs less to build on top of an existing structure than it does to go out.
- **Check the integrity of your existing structure.** If you want to build up, enlist the services of an architect or structural engineer to ensure that your house is up to the task.
- **Know your town's building regulations.** Get in touch with your local zoning administrator for the specifics. In some cases, regulations may limit your remodeling options. —M.L.



SEMI-INDUSTRIAL TOUCHES

At left, modern diagonal bracing supports the family room's 8-foot-square window overlooking the wooded backyard. Above, Scratch-Coat mortar was used to "finish" the surface of the fireplace in the living room.



A cement plaster wall makes a statement

Another notable design element—“The Wall,” as they call it—appears on the east side of the house, running the entire length of the addition. It mimics a concrete wall but is actually made of cement plaster troweled smooth onto a wood frame. It appeals to the couple’s affinity for modern materials while providing a visual barrier to the large, overpowering house next door. Darling had originally specified a true poured-concrete wall, but soon realized that it would be top-heavy and require too much effort and money to brace properly. By using gypsum plaster inside and cement plaster outside, he was able to get the thick masonry look he wanted.

The north end of the wall, near the garage, measures almost two stories high, so it adequately hides the house next door. Toward the south end, the wall drops to below one story. Reeded-glass clerestory windows were installed directly above the wall for light and privacy, and over them, full-length windows flood the second floor with light. The extra-thick wall also creates larger window thresholds, further editing the view while still letting in light.

Looking good, inside and out

The team chose untreated cedar siding for the exterior because it resembles the kind used on seaside structures—and because it would stand up to the outdoors. “We didn’t want to fight the elements. Cedar is water- and insect-resistant,” Darling says. “And it ages gracefully.” The cedar doesn’t require sealing or staining, but

SIMPLY MODERN
In keeping with the homeowners’ preferred contemporary style, the living room, above, is kept simple and spare, with clean lines and (mostly) smooth finishes. At right, a small, tidy office sits on the second floor, in the front of the house.



Bottom photo: John Sutton

Where to save and where to spend

By employing some creative strategies, homeowners Erik and Tena Watts and architect David Darling were able to reduce remodeling costs by about 20 percent of the going rate in the San Francisco Bay Area. Here's how they did it—as well as some advice on where not to cut corners:

Get the most for your money

► Research the fees and reputations of local tradespeople.

Erik and Tena found a painter in their small town who charged a third the rate of the San Francisco painter listed in the contractor's bid. They also found a mason who agreed to build a foundation in his off-hours.

► **Design your addition around a 4-foot module.** Basic siding, plywood sheathing, and drywall are all based on this measurement, so these materials won't have to be cut as often during the building process, and labor costs will decrease significantly.

► **Look in unexpected places for stock materials.** Darling found a window company that sold commercial-style aluminum sash windows at reasonable prices. He stacked the standard-size windows to create an open, custom look.

► **Use standard materials in unexpected ways.** The architect finished the living room fireplace surround with ScratchCoat, an undercoat that's usually used as a bonding material for tiles, plaster, and other materials.

► **Consider less-expensive cabinet options.** Darling faced the kitchen and bathroom cabinets with a maple-veneered plywood called ApplyPly, and used black melamine for the interior.

► **Do without cabinet and drawer hardware.** The architect designed a lip under each door to open cabinets and drawers without pulls or knobs.

Where it's worth spending extra

► **Artisans' work.** Hand-painted tiles, hand-carved wood details, decorative plasterwork, a center-stage piece of art—details such as these benefit from an artisan's touch.

► **Carpet.** While it's easy to find inexpensive carpet, it often has to be replaced every three to five years. Buy a high-quality product that will stand up to the foot traffic you expect.

► **General contractor.** Fees vary, but paying someone with good references and whose work you've seen is almost always worth the money. A dependable and hard-working contractor will save you time, worry, and headaches. —M.L.



KEEPING IT CLEAN The master bath is unadorned, with a pair of stainless sinks and unframed mirrors punctuating a wall of cabinets.

because it's in a moist environment, it does need to be bleached every five years to keep mold at bay.

Windows make all the difference in this house. "When I'm in our house, I don't really feel that I'm inside," Tena says. "In a lot of places where you would normally put a wall, David put in translucent windows, so we get light, but we also have privacy." Off the family room, in back, double doors and a large 8- by 8-foot window accentuate the wooded view. Diagonal bracing makes the window structurally sound but also acts as a design element that matches the home's semi-industrial style. Upstairs, similar windows and a door off the master bedroom also take advantage of the view.

Throughout the project, Darling suggested ways to trim the budget by creative use of materials and construction techniques (see sidebar at left). Today the new addition, with its utilitarian sensibility and affordable yet stylish



KITCHEN CLUTTER, CONTAINED At left, storage is well planned on the wall that separates the kitchen from one of the children's bedrooms. Below, counter space was tucked in between the kitchen and the dining area.



materials, fits the family perfectly. The Wattses enjoy a master suite and office upstairs, while their two sons have their own rooms on the reconfigured main level. The new family room is a hangout at all times of day. And the well-designed kitchen and dining room are suitable for everything from family breakfasts to evening get-togethers. The couple says every room is well loved and every dollar well spent.

A major remodel can be an expensive proposition—especially in the San Francisco Bay Area—but by keeping a careful eye on costs, the Wattses were able to stay in the neighborhood they love. “Our first house became our second house,” Erik says. “And now we’re here to stay.” **H**

Michelle Leise is a freelance writer in Red Wing, Minn.

For more information, see Resources, page 84.

Top left photo: John Sutton

BETWEEN MEALS
A compact dining area is open to the kitchen (over the counter at rear) and the living room (foreground).

