

# Local Color



A California designer looks to the Golden State's beaches, hills, and forests for this kitchen's shimmering palette

BY ALAN JENCKS

**B**udget-built in 1908 for a young couple who lost their home in the San Francisco earthquake, Judy's little Berkeley bungalow once overlooked the local farmlands and a distant glimpse of the bay. Now, 100 years later, the house sits snugly in a compact grid of closely sited houses of various ages and eclectic architectural styles. And though the farmlands are long gone, much of the city and neighborhood retains its verdant, charming nature.

Maintaining the spirit of this simple old Craftsman house was our first goal in designing Judy's new kitchen. The house had undergone at least eight alterations, and the kitchen had been boxed in by a couple of additions at the back of the house. Originally designed

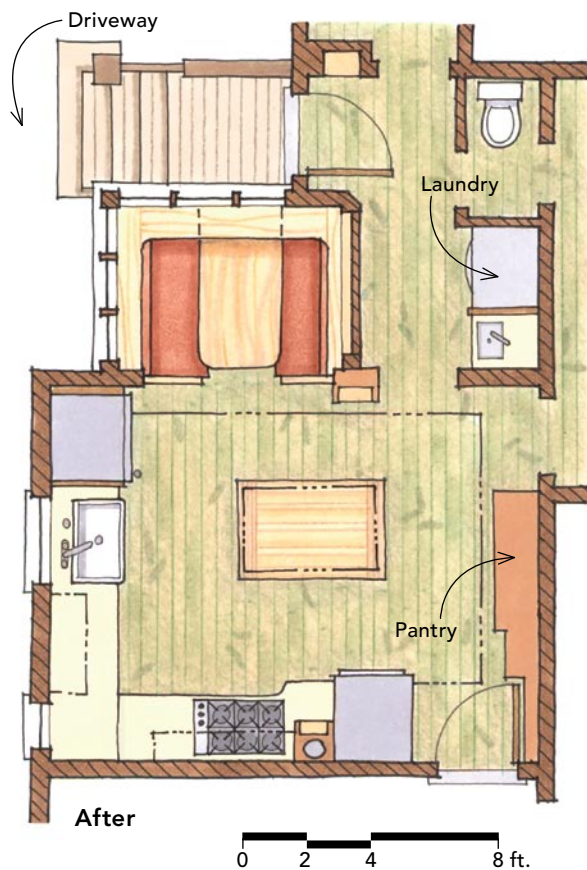
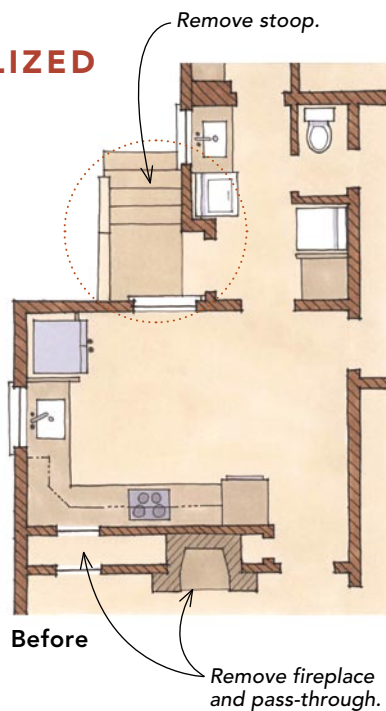


# Layers of light

**Florescent tubes atop the pot rack illuminate the ceiling,** while a pair of downlights provide task lighting for the island. The neighbor's house is a scant 15 ft. beyond the sink window. Painted white, the house is a big reflective surface that bounces afternoon light into the kitchen. Gauzy white drapes and swirly art glass tame the bright light, and play it across the kitchen's multi-colored surfaces. A narrow awning window at the end of the cooking alcove daylights the tile wall. Above the alcove, a hinged frame provides display space for a constantly changing gallery of poems and prints.

## MARGINALIZED INTO A CORNER

After 100 years of alterations, the kitchen was left with a single window and a doorway to the driveway. Taking out the old fireplace and the pass-through to the dining room, along with moving the stoop to the back, made room for a built-in booth and space for a small island. Pantry storage along the south wall makes up for the lack of upper cabinets.



as workspace suitable for the usual one-woman workforce of its day, the kitchen had since become part hallway. Dog-eared and dark, it needed a 21st-century dose of function and light.

### First, find 60 sq. ft.

Judy's list for the new kitchen was short but challenging. First, the new kitchen had to be easier to use, and it had to include space for a small island and a table that could seat up to six. Second, the kitchen needed daylight and details that reflected the local countryside.

It came down to only two places where we could realistically gain some space for a larger kitchen. As shown in the floor plan (drawings left), the thick wall between the kitchen and the dining room, with its pass-through, dumbwaiter, and masonry fireplace, could go. That freed up 22 sq. ft.—and eliminated the chimney, a 6-ton clinker-brick seismic time bomb.

But we still needed to find space for a table or booth, and gaining it wasn't easy. We went with the booth to conserve space, and we created a 6-ft.-sq. addition to accommodate it on the location of the former stoop to the backyard. Implementing this plan meant completely rearranging the existing laundry. This was unfortunate, in that the laundry, stoop, and door were all perfectly satisfactory. On the other hand, after playing with various floor plans and configurations, we realized that the existing location of other appliances and fixtures didn't need to be changed. Also, acquiring the additional space made room for an island as well as the booth.

### The color of geography

With the broad strokes of the floor plan sketched out, we set about creating a palette of light-infused, high-contrast, colorful, and diverse local colors. We revisited Judy's favorite California places, in person and from memory, and began collecting samples, shapes, and textures that expressed them.

I built a 2-ft. by 3-ft. canvas-covered storyboard for the lightweight samples. Heavier hunks of wood, stone, and glass went into a shallow cardboard box. To the storyboard, we applied pieces of tree bark, leaves, lichens, rocks, flowers, paint samples, and fabric and leather swatches. To the box, we added granite, marble, and synthetic countertop materials; stained glass; textured glass; and ceramic tiles. We interchanged and rearranged the many pieces, seeing which items interacted well and supported one another in fleshing out the theme.

In this manner the golden Nootka-cypress cabinets and trim came to represent the Bay Area hills; the white-and-gray-veined Carrara marble the sea foam and sand of our beaches; and the crackle-glazed yellow wall tile the warmth of the sun. The variegated stained glass that we chose for the lower half of the booth windows reminded us of our weather: San Francisco fog laced with hard, bright sunshine. The floral-tooled cognac-leather booth cushions suggest a classic Western story. And a bamboo floor tinted emerald green recalls a Sierra meadow in the spring. For really local color, the red trim of the house moves indoors to color the island's base.

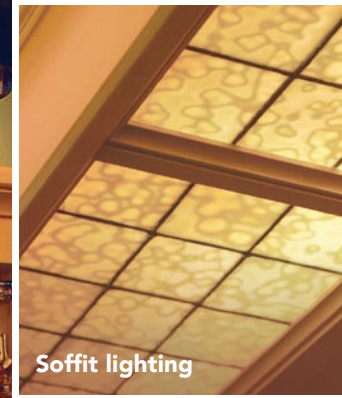
### Privacy and daylight

The tried-and-true way to enliven a dark and cramped room is to open it to the outdoors with windows, skylights, and glass doors. This strategy is a hallmark of 20th-century (and especially coastal California) architectural design. But we were faced with several constraints. The north-side exterior wall is hard against a property line, the adjacent house just 15 ft. away. The two houses are bisected by a well-traveled driveway.

This meant that the lower portion of every window provided an unwanted sightline, both from within and without. So for the benefit of passersby and diners, we glazed the lower sections of the booth windows with heavily obscured glass. The upper portions of the windows we glazed with a faintly obscured glass



Arcade lighting



Soffit lighting



Sorghum board



Plant shelf



Tooled leather

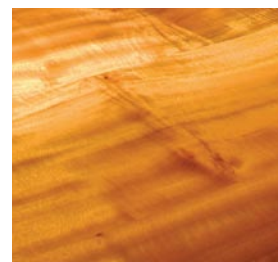
# Wrapped in gold

Nootka cypress in the cabinets, shelving, trimwork, and display niches is the canvas upon which other colors play in Judy's kitchen. The booth table tilts upward by way of a piano hinge for easy sweeping at cleanup time.



# chatoyant

*cha·toy·ant*



— *adj* 1. having changeable lustre; twinkling

## The myrtlewood countertop

on the island curves over at the ends, like an elongated cap of a Greek column. Painted cinnabar red, the island base continues the bungalow's exterior-trim color. Translucent layers of emerald-green glazes let the subtle nodules of the bamboo flooring peek through the varnish topcoat. Darker green stabs with a calligraphy brush suggest fallen bamboo leaves.



called German New Antique. It slightly distorts the view in a pleasing fashion, allowing Judy still to see the sky, rooftops, and distant trees. To unify the glazing along the north wall, we used Clear Deco (photo p. 38), the same heavily obscured glass in Judy's china cabinet near the sink.

To the right of the cooktop, we were able to squeeze in a tall, narrow awning sash, just inches from the west wall. Daylight reflected off the house next door plays across the tile wall of the cooking alcove, lighting up the northwest corner of the kitchen.

### Balance the illumination with three layers of artificial light

We had a very specific goal for the artificial lighting: Ensure that every corner, shelf, cabinet interior, countertop, and workspace was adequately lit and, moreover, that there would be the potential for two light sources that would reach every work zone.

Ambient lighting is provided by two T-5 fluorescent fixtures mounted atop the pot rack. They're positioned along opposite edges of the recess created by the crown molding. These Bartco MiT5 fixtures were factory-fitted with electronic dimming ballasts to power the T5 HO 39w 3500k lamps. The result is evenly distributed, dimmable, reflected light.

The pot rack also includes a pair of separately switched, low-voltage, halogen downlights (20w MR-16) for task lighting. Their trims are fabricated from the same cypress as the pot rack, finished in gold leaf, and then sealed with a clear-lacquer topcoat.

Another indirect light fixture is set into a wood frame that is integral with the booth's head casing. It is fitted with a 32w T-8 lamp mounted above a series of leaded obscure-glass lenses made from booth-window scraps.

A third level of general lighting is tucked behind and above the arched arcade frieze, where a low-voltage minitract fitted with 5w xenon lamps illuminates Judy's collection of pots. These lamps also serve as display lighting for objects placed on the ledge on which the arcade rests. Centered over the booth table for task and fill lighting is a broad cone-shaped fabric shade fitted for a single medium-base Edison lamp.

To light the cooktop counter and wall, we used several low-voltage, wet-use-rated, wall-mount landscape fixtures equipped with MR-16 lamps and powered by transformers mounted in the back of the oven cabinet. We chose these fixtures because they are compact and pointable; because they take various lenses for optical effects (to shape, soften, and diffuse the beam); and because they can introduce various colors to balance and enhance the various-hued surfaces. They also resist the effects of being located in the cooking exhaust stream.

The fixtures are perfect for this application due to their high gloss and durable powder-coated finish (making them easy to clean) and for being adjustable. They allowed us to put the light right where it was needed without having to worry about the often unpleasant and unintended consequences that fixed lamp fixtures might cause: shadows, hot spots, and unwanted reflections. This was especially important given the location of the suspended and adjustable-height double-plate shelf located above the cooktop, and the need to light both the shelf and the countertop surface. □

Alan Jencks is a designer in Berkeley, Calif. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.

### SOURCES

**Tile** [www.fireclaytile.com](http://www.fireclaytile.com) • **Art glass** [www.uroboros.com](http://www.uroboros.com) • **Upholstery leather** [www.spinneybeck.com](http://www.spinneybeck.com) • **Nite Star low-voltage lighting** [www.bklighting.com](http://www.bklighting.com) • **Fire-clay sinks** [www.shawsofdarwen.com](http://www.shawsofdarwen.com) • **Nootka cypress** [www.vanarsdaleharris.com](http://www.vanarsdaleharris.com) • **Sorghum board** [www.kireiusa.com](http://www.kireiusa.com) • **Wood turning** [www.haaswoodworking.com](http://www.haaswoodworking.com)

## STEALTH SHELF

The new laundry zone is in the hall off the kitchen. It consists of a stacked washer/dryer in the closet to the left (photo bottom) and a cabinet with a pop-up shelf for folding clothes.

