

TASTE: CHEESE, OF COURSE

NORTHWEST LIVING: RAMBLER OPENS UP

PLANT LIFE: THE WILD SIDE OF RHODIES

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

A man with long hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is sitting in a meditative pose on a log in a lush forest. He is surrounded by tall ferns and bamboo-like plants. The lighting is soft, creating a serene atmosphere.

BALANCING ACT

NORTHWEST PEOPLE

John Henry Browne
walks a thin line
between waging
courtroom war and
searching for
peace of mind

Some Breathing Room



An outdated dining nook and sunroom gave way to a swath of counter space and a wide-open deck — all the better to take in the view of Mount Rainier.



BY KIMBERLY B. MARLOWE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BARRY WONG



A cable-and-teak railing (also by Karl Mayer) around the opened stairway does triple duty as handrail, room divider and working sculpture.

A bit of magic transforms a practical rambler in Hawthorne Hills



A brushed-steel fireplace by local artisan Karl Mayer, bold wall colors and an open stairway turned a bland family room and two cramped bedrooms into a sophisticated, spacious living-dining-family room.



A staid 1958 Seattle rambler was well-built and spacious, but the floor plan was too choppy to suit the owner's need for casual entertainment space.

DEBORAH ELVINS WANTED TO pull her sturdy rambler out of its 1950s doldrums, opening up pinched spaces to gain breathing room for the friends and family who visit often.

What she got was a magic trick: Remove a wall here, open up a porch there, add some very bold color and — *abracadabra!* A clean, bright design that makes the most of a rambler's practical features, while minimizing shortcomings.

"The house was well-constructed and had some nice space," says the Seattle attorney about the 3,400-square foot Hawthorne Hills home she bought in 1996. "But it was too enclosed and kind of awkwardly set up. Plus, it was built in 1958, so we're talking lime-green tile and — ugh! — *carpet* in the kitchen."

Enter Seattle architects Julia Campbell and Buzz Tenenbom, husband and wife team of CTA Design Builders. (Elvins had worked with the couple to update a master bath in another house.)

Elvins knew she wanted to gain some space, and warm the place up — get rid of steel-framed windows and cool white walls. Campbell and Tenenbom agreed, and went a bit further, suggesting she open up a stairway in the middle of the main floor.

After taking out the walls of two tiny bedrooms to expand the family room, and opening up the stairway, the floor plan looks like this: kitchen, family area, living/dining area; master bedroom and bath on the main level. ➤

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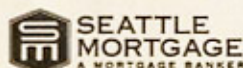
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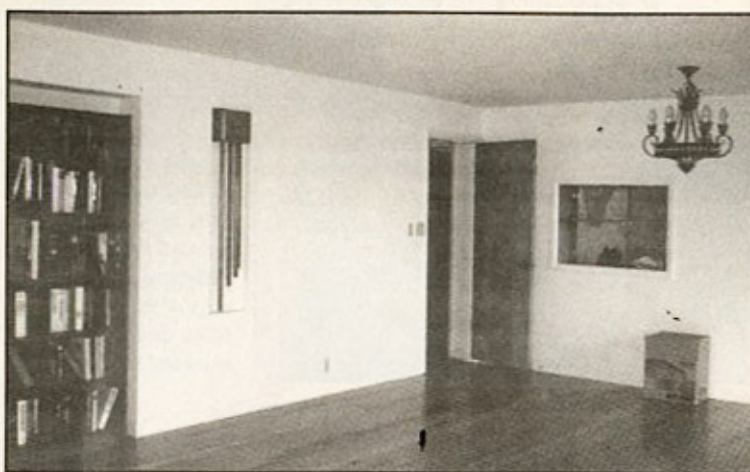
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NORTHWEST LIVING



Before the renovation,
the main floor was
divided into small,
dark rooms.

Downstairs stayed the same: another bedroom, rec room, utility room and bath.

A slate-floored sun-room off the kitchen was turned into a deck, and French doors to the back yard were added at the other end of the kitchen. "Before the door was added, there was really no access to the back yard," says Elvins. "You had to go out the front and walk all the way around."

Attractive, low-maintenance landscaping makes the newly accessible yard a perfect spot for family barbecues and gatherings that spill out of the house. On the lower level, more new French doors open to a paved courtyard.

All this sleight-of-hand — walls removed and stairway exposed, updated painting, wood floors restored or added, larger wood-trimmed windows and sliders throughout, new deck, landscaping and renovated master bath — cost about \$160,000.

Careful material choices along the way helped keep costs from climbing higher. "Originally we were looking at granite counters for the kitchen," says Campbell. When she discovered the cost would be close to \$10,000, she urged Elvins to go with a gray Formica — for \$500.

Good advice. Along with the sturdy counters, a sprinkling of striking metallic-threaded tiles along the wall, nickel drawer pulls and brushed aluminum sink, the kitchen gained a sleek yet warm look at a reasonable price. These metal accents are carried throughout the main floor, including a brushed-steel fireplace created by metal artisan Karl Mayer of the Seattle-based U.S. Starcraft.

Being able to go over big decisions and the smallest details with the same people was a real advantage, says Elvins.

"I liked working with a design-build team — especially one used to doing renovations and expansions of older homes," she says. "This way it was never a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was up to."

Other than removing a small dining nook, no structural changes were needed in the kitchen, a rectangular space edged by working counters and a new eating counter with stools. The oak floor replaces the much-maligned carpet, and maple cabinets play well

alongside the fir windows and sliders. Those bigger windows and doors pull in plenty of sunlight to set the new kitchen gleaming.

Updating the master bath was an experience familiar to anyone who had taken on a 1950s-vintage house. "It had the original bayberry-colored tub, toilet and sink," recalls Elvins with a laugh. "And pink tile."

A full exorcism of the bayberry demons cost about \$20,000, and resulted in a calm oasis of birch cabinets, off-white fixtures and cinnamon-colored concrete tile.

Overall the opened-up design encourages chatty gatherings: Traffic can move easily throughout the main floor. Only the master bedroom is off the beaten path.

With its new oak floor, brushed-steel fireplace (formerly pink tile) and socko red, aubergine and yellow-ocher walls, the living/dining and family areas are striking, yet not overpowering. Grouping planes of bright color so closely together grabs attention, drawing the eye through the expanded space.

Elvins keeps knickknacks and art to a minimum, wisely letting the bold wall colors stand alone. (Minimal clutter has another plus: Less stuff to scatter in the wake of Knolly, Elvins' chocolate Labrador retriever, an exuberant tail-wagger.)

That bright backdrop is just right for the cable-and-teak railing around the opened stairway, doing triple duty as handrail, room divider and a bit of working sculpture. (The railing was crafted by Mayer, as was the one on the new deck.)

Elvins set out to warm and widen her home, making it a welcoming gathering place for her extended family. She succeeded, and then some. The stylish yet unpretentious space is up to its hostessing tasks, and is a more comfortable nest in life's quieter moments as well.

For one thing, now that the buttoned-up sun-room is a wide-open deck off the kitchen, "On a clear morning, I can stand out there and look at Mount Rainier," says Elvins.

Now that's a nice Rambler.

Kimberly B. Marlowe writes Planet Northwest for the magazine. Barry Wong is a photographer for The Seattle Times.