

## PERSONAL

CUSTOMIZING A NEW HOME

## SPACE

BY JENNY QUILL



**John, a consultant,** and his wife, Susan, a homemaker, purchased a Tuscan-inspired house in Indian Wells, California, to be a home away from home where they could relax and recharge. The Toscana Country Club property was the right choice for many reasons, John says. Not only was there a lot to do, from golf and tennis to hiking and cycling, but the Vancouver, B.C., couple was able to help determine the design of their home.

"We really loved the Tuscan feel from the outside, but wanted it to look modern on the inside," says John. "The changes were significant, but the builder was totally supportive. They made us feel that we could build the house we wanted."

Toscana's developer, Sunrise Company, is embracing a growing trend in which developers enable buyers to customize their homes. Depending on the community, buyers can personalize items ranging

from the basics, such as cabinetry, countertops and flooring, to details such as stone patio pavers, as at Toscana.

Being able to tap into a developer's dedicated, already in-place team of design experts can greatly simplify the challenge of figuring out what you want for your home, says interior designer Tena Hill, manager of the Toscana Country Club Design Center. "It's a great opportunity to customize your home without having to go through a contractor or having to do all the design work yourself. We do it all for you. We design, project-manage and work with all the trades. We can design the house. The buyer signs off, leaves, and then comes back, and it's all done."

Following is a look at how several West Coast homeowners have been able to easily customize their properties by working with project developers.

CONTEMPORARY  
CUSTOMIZATION  
IN CALIFORNIA

John and Susan chose Toscana's Amalfi 623 floor plan, an approximately 4,000-square-foot, three-bedroom, three-bath home with a detached one-bedroom, one-bath casita, and then with Hill's assistance, they gave the interior a contemporary feel. In the open-concept kitchen, they achieved their vision by selecting flat-front, push-latch cabinets that set the tone for the sleek, clean-line design. To complement the cabinets, the couple swapped the standard granite countertops for white quartz and added a stylish waterfall edge on the kitchen island.

The couple also reconfigured the island's layout, making it rectangular vs. L-shaped, and replacing a sink with a cooktop. "We like to have a good flow when we're entertaining, and the rectangle shape worked better for us," says Susan. "Plus, with the cooktop in the island, we can cook while facing people who are in the family room."



John and Susan's home now has a sleek kitchen with clean lines; a living room with a high end bar unit for entertaining; and an upgraded patio and pool area.



They have both a family room and a living room, and to further facilitate entertainment, they upgraded to a high-end dark-oak bar unit in the bar area for the living room. The unit has a Sub-Zero wine fridge, two refrigerated drawers, a sink, and mirror-backed cabinets for glassware.

Some of the most significant changes were made to the outdoor living space. Because the back of the house faces southwest, John and Susan extended the roofline 4 feet over the patio to block the

Right: At the modern Vista North Pearl condominium, owners appreciate spacious patios and proximity to The Fields Park.



late-day sun. They also installed a built-in fireplace on the patio, selected a pair of firepits for the backyard, added a ledge-stone wall on one side of the property, and upgraded the pool to include a resort-worthy entrance with a sloping descent. They now have a wonderful outdoor space in which to enjoy picture-perfect views of the Santa Rosa Mountains and the ninth hole of Toscana's Jack Nicklaus Signature North Course.

## UPGRADES FOR A PORTLAND CONDO

Lisa and her husband, Gary, both executives in the apparel industry, spent three years looking for a permanent abode. The Portland, Oregon, residents found what they wanted at Vista North Pearl, a new 153-unit condominium tower in the hip

downtown Pearl District. They purchased a 1,600-square-foot unit, with two bedrooms and 2.5 baths, on the 15th floor, and they plan to move in this month. "We picked it mostly for the view," says Lisa. "It's southeast-facing, and we have views of the Willamette River, Mount Hood, the Broadway Bridge and ... the city."

At new condominium projects, customizing interior finishes is often reserved for penthouse suites, but because Lisa and Gary bought early in the building's development, they were able to work with Vista's design consultant, Sue Miller, to modify the floor plan. "There was a set list of available upgrades their designers and architects had put together," says Lisa, "but their design consultant was

Left and above: Vista North Pearl buyers can choose from light or dark interior finishes for the kitchen and other rooms, and some units overlook landscaped terraces and the Willamette River.

willing to go back and forth with the architects and designers to achieve the vision we had. Sue made big floor-plan changes seamless. Site sketched them out and went back to the architects, and we had a new plan within two days and the costs to do it."

The couple's first major change order involved removing an 8-foot-by-10-foot den that didn't fit their lifestyle. "It would make a good nursery," says Lisa, "but we don't have children, and we don't need an office, as we do most of our work at the kitchen table. We loved everything about the unit but that den, so why not remove it?" They love to entertain, so they added most of the den space to their living room,

and they plan to install a custom wet bar.

They also reconfigured the front entry to improve the flow, and they created space for additional storage—including a linen closet for the master bathroom—by pushing the bathroom wall back a few feet and moving the master bedroom door.

Like all Vista buyers, Lisa and Gary were able to choose light or dark interior finishes for their cabinets, countertops, kitchen backsplash and flooring, which set the color palette for the condo. The options included light-wood or dark-wood floors, and white, light-gray or steel-gray cabinets, counters and backsplashes. "We went with the light palette because the space isn't enormous, and with the light



## CUSTOMIZING FOR A LONGTIME HOME

If you've been in your house for a while, you might be thinking about updating and customizing to make it more attractive, comfortable or functional, notes the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. As you plan a remodel, consider what your needs will be over the next five to 20 years, NARI recommends.

For example, Nicholas and Shelley, a busy professional couple

in the Seattle area, chose materials based on longevity and installation time, as well as appearance, for a remodel of their early-1980s home. They wanted to minimize the disruption to their current lives, and also lessen the need for future remodels. "Our first two questions for everything were, 'How long will this last?' and 'How long will it take to install?'" says Nicholas.

In their kitchen, the original cabinets were in good structural condition, and the layout was working well, so the couple just

needed an updated look. To help reduce remodel time, their contractor suggested using Seattle area-based Heritage Homecraft to reface the existing cabinets with quarter-inch solid hardwood. The company's carpenters also built sturdier pantry pullout drawers, a two-shelf cabinet where a seldom-used trash compactor had been, and a strong "Super Susan" to replace sagging Lazy Susan revolving shelving. In addition, Heritage installed a new quartz countertop. The crews finished all the kitchen work in about a week, Nicholas says, and completed similar updates to two bathrooms in a few days.

For kitchen, living-room and bedroom flooring, the couple worked with experienced flooring consultant Josh Ledbetter at Floor Decorators Carpet One in the Puget Sound region. He walked them through the pros and cons of various options to help them settle on a luxury vinyl tile for the kitchen, and a nylon carpet known for its durability for the other rooms.

To choose modern stainless steel replacements for their 34-year-old stove and 14-year-old

fridge, the couple did extensive research to narrow down the prospects. Then they turned to Lindsey Miguelena, a longtime expert at locally based Albert Lee Appliance, to help them weigh considerations such as probable life expectancy, functionality and cost. They ended up choosing a convection oven, and the fridge with the most interior space.

"We learned throughout the remodel process that it was helpful to find knowledgeable people who saw their role as being consultants," says Nicholas. "It was also vital to communicate clearly with everyone, and to use-test large samples when possible before we made final decisions."

Because each family is different, it's important for homeowners to weigh their specific current and future needs, and also consider how remodel choices will affect factors such as energy use, technology use and ability to weather storms, as well as which choices will provide the most return for the money, according to NARI. For more information on remodeling and customizing, visit websites such as [nari.org](http://nari.org) and [natb.org](http://natb.org).



floors, we won't see our Ridgeback dog's reddish fur," explains Lisa.

Also available to all buyers were upgrades such as exchanging the standard Bosch kitchen appliances for luxe Wolf or Sub-Zero counterparts, an option Lisa and Gary chose.

In addition, the couple opted for wood flooring in the bedrooms instead of carpet, added extra lighting in the living area, and chose a handheld showerhead in the master bath.

"Working with the design team was a very positive experience," Lisa says. "We ended up with an environment that is beautiful and functional, and we're very excited to move in and start enjoying our new home."

## BRIGHT AND OPEN IN SEATTLE

Professional photographers Katarina and Jim moved to Mercer Island, east of downtown Seattle, a few years ago after

purchasing a lot and a home design from area builder JayMarc Homes. The couple appreciated the site's location, next to scenic Luther Burbank Park, and the four-bedroom, 3.5-bath floor plan that included the opportunity to customize. "We didn't want a stock home—we wanted to add our own touches—and the developer was eager to collaborate with us," Katarina says.

For help achieving the look they wanted, the couple worked with JayMarc Homes Interior Design Director Aimee Upper, as well as interior designer Nichole Jacobson and landscape designer/contractor Bryan LaComa, who own their own businesses.

Katarina and Jim's biggest change was to convert a first-floor bedroom and full bath into an additional sitting area with a fireplace, and an adjacent powder room. "We didn't need four bedrooms and 3.5

Homeowners Katarina and Jim customized their large Seattle-area home with modifications such as converting a bedroom into a sitting room with a fireplace, and upgrading lighting throughout the house.

baths, but we knew we'd appreciate more living area," Katarina says.

To achieve their desire for bright, open spaces, the couple eliminated several doors, widened doorways, selected light-colored, extra-wide wood-plank flooring, and upgraded lighting throughout. "Being photographers, lighting is extremely important," says Katarina. They invested significantly in built-in lighting to spotlight photos and paintings, and installed adjustable recessed LED lights along the entry hallway. "It adds so much dimension to that space," says Jim. In addition, they created a lighting system with a central control from which they can adjust the lighting in different parts of the house.

In the kitchen, they upgraded to Calacatta marble countertops and chose tall, flat-front kitchen cabinets that extend to the ceiling. They swapped the standard

## CUSTOMIZING FOR RENTAL INCOME


In addition to customizing for their own enjoyment, some homeowners, particularly vacation-property homeowners, also choose touches to make their homes more rental friendly, enhancing the potential for return on investment.

For instance, added amenities such as a hot tub, a firepit, a porch swing and a pingpong table can be big draws for rental guests, according to Kimberly White, senior director of Design Services for Vacasa, a Portland, Oregon-headquartered company that is one of the country's largest providers of professional vacation-rental-management services for vacation properties across the globe.

It is also helpful to provide amenities ranging from vintage board games to dog bowls and dog treats, White says. And in the winter, homeowners can create a sense of extra warmth for themselves and rental guests by adding cozy knit throw blankets,



a leather ottoman, a piece of wood furniture, and an extra floor lamp or reading lamp. Creating a dedicated spot right inside the door for boots, coats and umbrellas is advantageous, too, White says.




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appliances for commercial-grade models, and asked Jacobson to design a custom stainless steel range hood to complete the kitchen's sleek, contemporary look.

In the butler's pantry, a tap dispenses filtered sparkling water.

In the adjoining butler's pantry, the couple added a coffee and beverage station, replete with a tap that dispenses filtered sparkling water. "It's the most popular feature in our house," says Katarina.

The couple turned to LaComa to help them design all of their landscaping, including a large outdoor kitchen. Accessible via French doors from the living room, their patio was originally a small, simple affair. LaComa extended the original concrete slab by about 30 percent and added a well-equipped kitchen with concrete countertops, and items such as a gas grill and a built-in commercial smoker.

Because Katarina and Jim didn't want to build a custom home from scratch, the ability to alter an existing plan suited them well. "We loved that we didn't have to do everything from just a plot of land," says Katarina. "We knew we wanted to have control over the design. It wouldn't have worked if we couldn't have made these upgrades. It's a huge process, and our team went above and beyond." ✕

Jenny Quill writes about topics ranging from home design to travel.