




Enhancing Your Home

The best design combines creature comforts and greater resale appeal | By Jenny Quill



Building, renovating or remodeling a home often stems from a desire to make your living quarters more enjoyable for your family. Enhancing everyday livability might mean adding a home theater, a home office, a sunroom or a mudroom, or creating more pantry space and a luxurious master suite. Whatever your needs, investing in good design makes sense: Not only will you and your family be happier with your home while you live there, but you'll also likely reap rewards come sale time. Here's a look at several homeowners who enhanced their homes for present enjoyment and future value: 

Creative Approach

Sometimes renovating means thinking outside the box, which is what Robin Wilson Carrier and her husband, Gordon Carrier, did when they overhauled the master bedroom in their Point Loma, California, residence. Robin is the owner and design principal at Robin Wilson Interior Design, and Gordon, an architect, is a co-owner and the design principal at Carrier Johnson and Culture.

When the couple began remodeling the home they purchased in 1992, they knew they wanted to create a relaxing master suite where they could take a break from their busy lives. That vision further evolved as they lived on the property during the home's renovation. "There's a granny's flat—about 400 square feet—where we lived during the remodeling process," says Wilson Carrier. "We got used to living in one room—to that whole kind of cozy retreat."

To continue that feeling, the couple installed two hotel-like amenities in their new bedroom: a private deck with a hot tub, and a custom built-in along the bedroom's far wall. The built-in features a wet bar,

An Oahu homeowner was able to gain more livable space without increasing his home's footprint by adding more outdoor-living areas, which also showcased the stunning view.

and storage areas (always a big selling point in master bedrooms) for a coffee maker, wine, an undercounter refrigerator, a 32-inch flat-screen TV, and CDs, DVDs and iPod accessories. Their revamped space also has a new gas fireplace.

“We could live in that room,” Wilson Carrier says. “We liked the idea of being able to have a retreat, and have a glass of wine, enjoy a movie and the fire, wake up and make coffee in the morning, or have a cup of coffee and sit in the Jacuzzi. It’s nice to have it all gathered in one place.”

The gas fireplace was a particularly smart addition, according to the National Association of Realtors’ Profile of Buyers’ Home Feature Preferences. Twenty-one percent of buyers surveyed said that finding a home with one or more fireplaces was very important, while 46 percent of respondents said they’d be willing to pay more for a home with one or more fireplaces.

Fitting the fireplace into the unusual octagonal space of the Carriers’ bedroom wasn’t easy. Instead of creating a standard rectangular hearth, Gordon Carrier designed the hearth to come out at an angle. “You have to play with the shapes that the perimeter creates,” she says.

The hearth is covered in smooth, black beach pebbles that also appears in the master-bathroom backsplash, around the master-bathroom shower and tub, and in the front garden.

Cantilevered shelves behind the bed were another smart solution to the geometric dilemma posed by the room’s nonrectilinear angles. “If I sat a piece of furniture there, it would stick out,” says Wilson Carrier. The shelves display books and objets d’art, and also hide technological clutter. “One shelf continues behind the headboard, and that’s where I put the light switch, and wires and plugs,” says Wilson Carrier. “It’s all hidden behind the headboard.”

Trading Spaces

The owners of a home in Battle Ground, Washington, about 35 minutes outside of Portland, Oregon, were initially intent on doing a major addition when they hired Sandy Hayes, a Portland-based certified master kitchen and bath designer. “It was envisioned as this very large addition. Then we realized [the



expense] as we got into the space,” says Hayes. “We started playing with it and realized it was better to keep the existing footprint.”

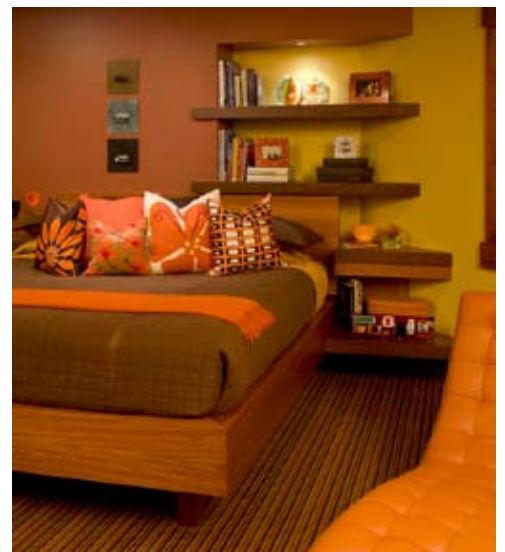
Opting to do a renovation rather than a large add-on saved the couple approximately \$50,000 while still accomplishing their design goals of creating an open-concept space with an updated kitchen, and adjacent sitting and dining rooms.

According to Hanley Wood’s 2009 Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report, homeowners who did a mid-range major kitchen remodel in the Portland area could expect to recoup approximately 81 percent of the project’s cost through increased resale value, while an upscale major kitchen remodel would regain only about 70 percent.

Hayes switched the sitting and dining rooms to accommodate the homeowners’ request for more space in which to relax and unwind. The couple was using their nooklike sitting room much more than the dining room, yet the dining

A kitchen remodel gave Battle Ground, Washington homeowners more storage space and an inviting place to relax and unwind.

A California couple created a master retreat with a gas fireplace, a custom built-in with a wet bar, coffee maker, undercounter refrigerator and wine storage, and display-and-storage shelves behind the bed.



room was originally the bigger space.

“They had everything jammed into the sitting room, which is now the dining room,” says Hayes. “So I said, ‘Why don’t we make that the sitting area, and fit the dining room into the nook area?’ Now they can comfortably read the newspaper in front of the fireplace [which was already in the room that became the new sitting room].”

For Hayes, it was important that all three areas flow seamlessly into each other but still feel like distinctly separate spaces. To create cohesive design flow, she used Ekowood engineered hardwood flooring throughout all three areas, extended the kitchen’s cherry-wood cabinets to flank the fireplace and painted all of the walls—with the exception of a paprika-colored accent wall in the dining room—the same golden-yellow hue. To set the sitting room off from the other spaces, Hayes and the homeowners set an area rug across the room and angled the furniture toward the wood-burning fireplace.

She not only replaced the home’s dated white cabinetry with the cherry-wood cabinets, but she also moved the kitchen doorway over to the east by 30 inches to improve the flow from the front entry into the kitchen and gain the space she needed for a refrigerator and pantry. The pantry and the cabinetry surrounding the fireplace added nearly 10 additional linear feet of storage, an invaluable asset for any home cook. Other useful touches included roll-out shelves in the pantry and for small appliances; deep pull-out drawers for cookware; cutlery dividers; tray dividers; and a double recycling pull-out.

The intricately designed Enkeboll cabinet door fronts on either side of the stove ventilation hood pay homage to the couple’s love of wine. The doors depict monks making wine—from picking the grapes to fermenting the wine in barrels.

A growing wine collection calls for a built-in wine refrigerator for white wines (red wines are kept in a separate cabinet), which Hayes added, along with replacing old white appliances with new stainless-steel ones, including a dishwasher, refrigerator, five-burner gas cooktop, double ovens, ventilation hood and below-counter microwave.

While stainless-steel appliances may not increase your home’s value, they do increase your kitchen’s “wow” factor, says Hayes, and they were the right choice for this particular space. “White or black would have been glaring against the warm wood cabi-



nets. Stainless steel is much softer and more neutral.”

The material selections for the countertops and backsplash were based on the kitchen island’s paprika hue. “The owner said, ‘Let’s do red,’” Hayes says. “That started the whole theme.”

The countertops are Red Montana Granite, a popular countertop material known for its durability and heat resistance. The backsplash, which Hayes extended to the ceiling in order to visually negate the ceiling’s low height, consists of limestone tiles laid on the diagonal (again, to create visual height), with red glass-tile inserts for pops of color. “Glass was the perfect complement to the natural stone to pick up the gemlike quality in the granite countertops,” Hayes says. A 2009 National Kitchen and Bath Association list of top kitchen and bath trends identified glass elements as an up-and-coming trend, specifically when used in backsplashes or countertops.

Night at the Movies

At 6,800 square feet, an Arizona vacation retreat wasn’t your typical intimate getaway home. But the owners, a couple with a 1-year-old daughter, wanted a second home that didn’t skimp on the amenities. Case in point: the home theater, which was originally a guest room.

“They asked me if we could do a home theater that is like a boudoir—very comfy, very intimate and inviting—where they could watch TV together,” says Valerie Marcus of Scottsdale-based VM Concept Interior Design Studio. “They didn’t want a traditional theater with a curtain.”

The space, which is located on the second floor of

In an Arizona getaway home, a guest room was transformed into an intimate, inviting theater, with lighting that makes the room comfortable for reading when movies aren’t being shown.

a tower and is 23 feet around, presented Marcus with the challenge of finding a place to mount the massive 103-inch TV screen. Because the circular room has four windows and a door that leads to a balcony, Marcus was left with only one open wall on which to hang the television.

“I didn’t have a lot of choice of how I was going to put this big-screen TV in the room,” Marcus says. “In order to not lose too much space, I hung the video projector from the ceiling. I then created a seating platform for quality of viewing.”

The raised platform gives viewers on the back couch the same unobstructed view as those in the front, just like stadium seating at your local movie theater.

The room’s canyonlike acoustics were another challenge. “The acoustics were strange,” Marcus says. “There was an echo, so we needed to pad everything.”

She lined the walls with golden-brown, faux-silk upholstery, which absorbs sound. Laying down carpet, which also absorbs noise, was another solution to the sound issue, and added to the theater’s cozy feel.

To conceal all of the necessary home-theater gadgetry, Marcus custom-designed an alder-wood media console, which stores everything from the subwoofer to DVDs. The console is round on the back to accommodate the room’s curves, while the cabinet-door faces were covered with the same upholstery used on the walls. She also used alder for custom ceiling moldings and window casings that helped to tie the room’s design together.

So that the homeowners could get as much use out of the space as possible, Marcus gave them several lighting options. During the day, sunshine pours in through the windows, so for midday TV viewing, she created custom, flat Roman shades that block out all of the light. Four can lights in the ceiling brighten the space for reading when the natural light isn’t enough, while stylish wall sconces emit a warm but not overwhelming glow.

“You can watch TV, watch a movie or hang around and read a magazine,” Marcus says. “It’s not a home theater where you only watch a movie. And next to the TV there’s a door that leads to a gym. The wife

can be in the theater having a glass of wine while the husband can go in the gym.”

While it’s difficult to assign a resale value to a home-theater addition, Marcus believes that the true value is in the comfort and convenience a theater provides, and in providing the added “wow” factor needed to attract buyers in certain real estate markets. “A home theater certainly adds value,” she says, “and that value depends on the quality of the components they choose, and having great design.”

A Better Bathroom

The owners of a 1950s Olympia, Washington, waterfront home had completed several renovations since purchasing the property 25 years ago, but the bathrooms, including a half bath, were still in need of updating. Luckily for the owners, bathroom remodels tend to provide good return on investment. According to the 2009 Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report, upscale bathroom remodels in the Seattle area could recoup about 72 percent of the renovation cost through gains in resale value.

The original half bath had carpet—a moisture-absorbing, mold-growing no-no—dated light fixtures, a laminate countertop and wallpaper-covered walls. And it wasn’t up to the standards of the homeowners’ most frequent (and particular) houseguest, their 8-year-old granddaughter, Loren.

“She had a part in the design,” says interior designer Diane Gassman of The Artisans Group. “They invited her to one of the meetings. Her only request was for blue.”

Gassman took that inspiration and ran with it, using glass tiles in aqua blue, cream, taupe and a brushed-gold-tone finish. She installed the tiles—which come in 12-by-12 sheets—starting at the vanity and running up to the ceiling. “Instead of being a treatment on the wall, the tile is the wall,” she says. “Because you don’t see the edges of the tile, there is a subtlety, a mystery and intrigue to the material usage.” And because the bathroom lacks a window, the light that reflects off the tiles from the pendant light fixture helps to illuminate the space.

Gassman also installed a 67-inch single-sink vanity, replete with top drawers for cosmetics and toiletries, and hand-towel

storage on both sides. “The storage is necessary to meet everyone’s needs, and having countertop space is always an added plus in a multipurpose bath for guests,” she says. The vanity is topped by a Chroma eggshell-colored, polished-slab quartz that’s known to be heat-, stain- and scratch-resistant and impervious to water.

Gassman replaced the powder room’s original carpet with 20-inch-by-20-inch linen-pattern tiles, which add texture and pick up the soft color tones of the space.

“Most people wouldn’t use that large a tile in this small a bathroom,” Gassman says, “but it was appropriate because it makes the space feel large.” She adds that textured tile with a pattern or woven design is an up-and-coming trend that’s making its way into more and more bathrooms.

The Modern Lanai

A buyer who purchased a waterfront property in Oahu’s posh Portlock neighborhood “wanted something very modest—the home is less than 3,500 square feet, which is a small house for that area, and for a luxury house,” says Holly Boling Ruiz of the Honolulu-based interior-design firm Philpotts & Associates Inc. The owner’s design preferences reflected that same desire for understatement.

“He was very respectful of the land, and wanted the house to meld into the land and not become this big McMansion,” she says.

To add livable space without growing the home’s footprint—and to take advantage of the stunning location—the design team created two outdoor-living spaces: a covered dining room (the home’s second) that’s open to the back yard and connects to the living room via doors, and a trellis-covered lanai that extends out from the family room and that Boling Ruiz dubbed “the hau terrace,” after the hau tree that’s planted on one side of the trellis and that will climb up and above the trellis as the tree grows, with its leaves providing additional shade and extra greenery. The outdoor dining room has sweeping views of the Pacific.

Since the indoor and outdoor spaces flow into each other, Boling Ruiz wanted to create a cohesive line of sight by using the same type of flooring throughout the

kitchen, dining, family and living rooms. She was fortunate to come across an extensive supply of quartzite, an affordable—about \$3 per square foot—and durable stone flooring that's suitable for both interior and exterior applications.

"It's very, very durable; slip resistant; can be hosed down; it's super easy to take care of; and it has a very natural, casual look to it," Boling Ruiz says.

The hau terrace was also an affordable way to add livable space, she says. "It's the least expensive way to add square footage to your house because you don't have to build anything. [The terrace] doesn't even have a concrete slab under it."

In place of concrete, which absorbs heat, Boling Ruiz created a floor by laying down basalt pavers in the grass, and filling in some of the gaps with river rocks. "It's a very soft way to have a hardscape," she says. "The grass cools down the environment, and it's visually cooling—your eye isn't strained; it's gentle and familiar."

Installing a cedar trellis instead of a standard roof created a partially shaded lanai that felt like an interior space and yet was still very much connected to the outdoors. "We wanted to provide a partially shaded space that was an extension of the family room," Boling Ruiz says. "The whole idea was to encourage people to be focused out to the view by orienting everything that way."

Boling Ruiz says nearly 95 percent of her home renovations entail the expansion of lanais to create more living, dining or gathering-area space. Homeowners want, and home buyers look for, well-designed outdoor spaces when the climate allows for indoor/outdoor living, she says.

IT'S HARD TO PUT A PRICE ON PERSONAL COMFORT, but it's one of the main reasons most of us decide to build or renovate in the first place, and by making smart design choices, we also can add to the buyer appeal of our homes if we decide to sell. No matter what project you're considering to make your home more enjoyable, good design can marry livability with value. ▲

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