

THE GOOD LIFE

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

A family-friendly renovation that's easy on the environment? It's a win-win. *By Sara Morrow*

CALL IT THE HOUSE THAT SKYPE BUILT. In 2011, while living as expats in Tokyo and then Singapore, Stephanie Kerst and her husband, Stuart, took on the renovation of a Menlo Park, California, bungalow as they prepared to return to the States. "It was a pretty unusual way to build a home," Stephanie says. But through a series of video calls with architect Ana Williamson (*awarchitect.com*) and contractor Brian Emery (*mediterraneodesignbuild.com*), they devised a plan to expand on the existing 900-square-foot home in a way that made sense for them—and was good for the planet.

"My parents are lifelong environmentalists, and Stuart's grandfather was a game warden," Stephanie says. "So that awareness has been passed down through the generations." The couple hired a salvage demolition crew to save building materials that could be recycled or donated, then revamped the house using sustainable materials. Although they added a master suite and expanded office, the Kersts kept the home small, around 2,000 square feet, in favor of a more spacious backyard, which is big enough for outdoor dining and play areas.

The formula has worked perfectly for the family. "I can be in the kitchen or living room and see the kids playing in the yard or riding their bikes out front," says Stephanie. "The house isn't huge, but it's designed just for us."



"These are people who know how to live well—and how to live simply. And that's such a great model."

—ANA WILLIAMSON, ARCHITECT



PRIORITIZE DURABILITY

Williamson used cement fiberboard and integral color stucco on the exterior (top). "It doesn't have to be repainted every three to five years, so it's better for the environment," says Stuart, with Stephanie; Ford, 4; and Avery, 7.

CHOOSE NATURAL SURFACES

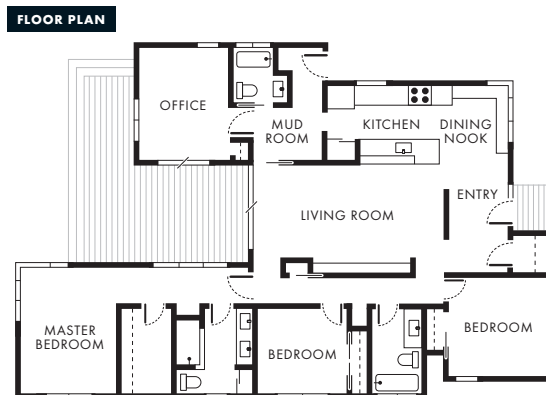
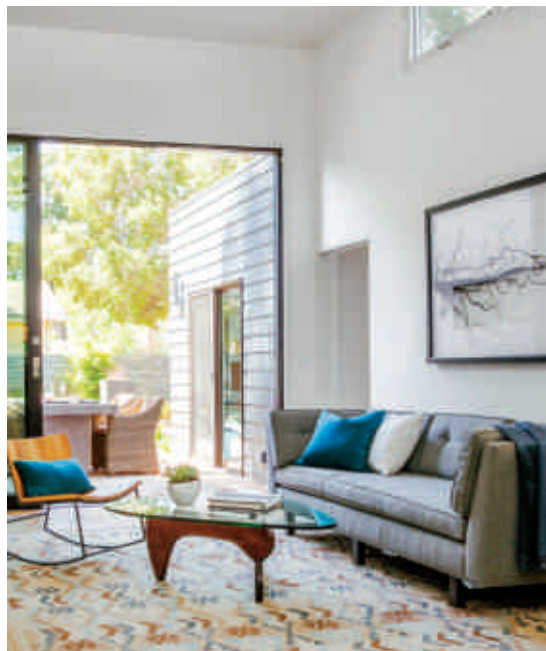
Shunning carpet helped avoid fumes and off-gassing that can take place after installation. Instead, the couple sourced engineered European white oak for the floors and rift white oak for the kitchen cabinetry (above).

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The kitchen banquette (opposite) fit the couple's desire to keep the design as pared down as possible. With "modern organic" as their filter, they added in textural furnishings like the rough-hewn table and blown-glass and iron chandelier.

PROP STYLING: MIKHAI ROMAIN





OPEN UP SPACES

In the living room (above right), Williamson raised the roofline to 12 feet. "That created a sense of loftiness, which makes the space feel larger than it is," she says. Industrial 10-foot sliding doors allow a view to the 100-foot-tall redwoods in the backyard.

MAKE YOUR BACKYARD WORK FOR YOU

Rather than add a formal dining space to the house, they moved the room onto the deck (right), where their family has dinner at the table, from Mill Valley's

Terra Patio, most nights. There's plenty of yard for Avery and Ford to "run around, jump off rocks, and generally get in trouble," Stuart adds. "The last thing we wanted to do was eat up the whole backyard."

KEEP IT STREAMLINED

"A lot of our inspiration came from our time in Japan," Stuart says, explaining the home's contemporary look. A few heirloom pieces came back with them, like the cabinet from Singapore in their entryway (above). It's a convenient spot to stash shoes.



PLANT FOR YOUR CLIMATE

Jim Redman of Elements Landscape (elements-landscape.com) devised a yard (above) with plants that don't need a great deal of hydration, including Delta bluegrass.



PUT A PREMIUM ON NATURAL LIGHT

In the master bedroom (far left), a high window allows for ample sunshine while keeping the room private from the lot next door. The number of windows and their placement was strategic to allow as much daytime light as possible, something both Williamson and the Kersts like for its energy efficiency.

KEEP TECHNOLOGY AT BAY

When it came to the kids' rooms and bathroom (left and below), the Kersts

thought less about color schemes and furnishings and more about reducing exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) from wireless technology, fluorescent lighting, and electric devices (see "How to Limit EMFs," far left). To that end, they placed the electrical meter—an analog model, which emits less radiation than a smart meter—far from the bedrooms and installed incandescent lights in place of CFL bulbs, which emit higher levels of dirty electricity. "For us, lowering our exposure to EMFs is on that list of keeping a healthy home," says Stephanie. ☘

HOW TO LIMIT EMFs

All objects have an electromagnetic field, but there's growing concern that the EMFs emitted by electric devices could have negative effects on long-term health. The Kersts aren't unplugging completely (you can read about their experience at Stephanie's site, sageliving.us), but Stephanie suggests these ways to limit exposure:

- 1** Hard-wire the Internet connection, computers, and devices such as baby monitors to reduce wireless transmissions around you.
- 2** If you do have Wi-Fi, turn it off at night, when you won't use it anyway.
- 3** Move phone chargers out of the bedroom and use a wired headset or speakerphone during calls when possible.

