



Remodels give ranch house in Strawberry a contemporary update

By ANN MIZEL

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The Strawberry home had never been an eye-catcher.

At 1,160 square feet, the three-bedroom, one-bath 1950s ranch house located on a particularly busy stretch of East Strawberry Drive was easy to miss — until remodels from back-to-back owners transformed the property into a contemporary gem.

The result is a 1,860-square-foot four-bedroom, 2½-bathroom home with fresh landscaping that stands out from its neighbors and demands a second look.

The work began in 2016, after the house was purchased by Steve and Tracy Morris. They started a six-month remodel, brightening up the one-story



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Jacque Dara purchased her East Strawberry Drive home in 2017. The house had undergone one remodel under its previous owners, and Dara initiated additional work, transforming the three-bedroom 1950s ranch house into a four-bedroom contemporary home.

house with a rear wall of larger windows, a new slider and skylights.

They also gutted the center of the house, creating a new living room and

a sleek, up-to-date open kitchen, and turned one of the two garages and a storage area into a spacious master bedroom and bath looking out to the garden.



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The master bedroom was added to the back of the house during an earlier remodel by the home's previous owner. After Jacquie Dara bought the house in 2017, she started a second remodel that resulted in the current four-bedroom contemporary home. The powder room, designed to make a small space look bigger, features 12-inch, bold-patterned Italian tile on the back wall.

However, after completing the remodel, the Morrises unexpectedly had to move back to their native Australia. The house was sold to current owner Jacquie Dara in 2017.

"We had reached our remodeling goal when we had to move," says Tracy Morris.

She says she had no idea the new owner would press on with a second phase of remodeling.

"What she did had never occurred to us," Morris says.

Dara moved into the home with her

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— Contractor Tom Redmond of Novato-based Redmond Construction

daughter, Mia.

"I loved the open floor plan and the big back garden," she says.

She and her daughter lived there for almost a year before Dara began her



own remodel, using the Morrises' Sausalito-based architect, Bryan Murdock, and Novato-based contractor, Tom Redmond of Redmond Construction.

With the original team in place, Dara went forward with Murdock's plan to pop out 5 feet across most of the front of the house. That extra space accommodated an eating bay, a small entry area, a coat closet and a small powder room, made to appear larger with the use of 12-inch bold-patterned Italian tile on the back wall.

"The tile in blues, whites and tans really fools the eye and is fabulous in a small space," Redmond says.

The push-out also gave Dara a corner for her baby grand piano; she's



The remodel of Jacquie Dara's East Strawberry Drive home has a sleek kitchen that opens up to the living space. It also included popping out 5 feet across most of the front of the house that allowed Dara to create a nook for her baby grand piano in the living room. Behind the piano is a gray barn door that can buffer the sound of the piano and add privacy when closed; when open, it reveals a wide full-length mirror that makes the space look larger.

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Dara enjoys because it reflects the living room, kitchen and dining area.

“It makes the space look larger,” she says. Dara added a fireplace flanked by shelves and an additional skylight in the main living area.

Instead of going to the expense of vaulting the 8-foot ceiling, Murdoch designed a series of five evenly spaced light wells that illuminate the living area and spread the light from the skylights out, giving the appearance of a higher ceiling.

a dedicated player who has performed competitively. Behind the piano is a gray barn door that acts as a sound barrier and adds a degree of privacy.

“The barn door gives the living

room a little pizzazz and is a nice contrast with the light walls around it,” Redmond says.

When the barn door is slid open, it reveals a wide, full-length mirror that

The three original bedrooms — now serving as Mia's room, a guest room and a combined office and TV room, respectively, share a remodeled bath that stole 3 feet from an adjacent closet. That closet previously housed the furnace, which was moved to the attic.

The bathroom sports waterfall tile that starts on the tub and shower walls and continues along the floor.

Floors throughout most of the house are 8-foot French oak random planks, wire brushed and hand stained with distressed edges. Hunter-Douglas window coverings are sheer Roman shades that let in light but allow for privacy.

Curb appeal was a major focus of Dara's remodel. A portico was added over the front door, cutting back the former 6-foot overhang and giving the house a less-standard '50s look.

The exterior of the home also got a fresh paint job.

"Paint transforms everything," Murdock says.

He noted the house and trim were all painted the same dark gray-blue.

"It's the lack of detail that lets the façade show off," he says.

The custom-made natural cedar front door with strips of opaque glass adds contrast. The garage door, also in the cedar, carries out the same horizontal lines as the front door, the siding of the house and the front fence.

Landscape designer Dane Rose of Mystical Landscapes in San Rafael worked on both the Morris' and Dara's remodels of the home. He worked around



Two back-to-back remodels helped give this East Strawberry Drive ranch house a contemporary update, including a fresh gray-blue paint job and a natural cedar door. The backyard features a raised sitting area and lawn with a stone patio.

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an existing Japanese maple tree by the front door and changed the shape of the square, awkward slope of the front lawn, creating a curved, softer look.

Rose stained the front fence to tie in with the front of the house and installed a smart irrigation system.

"I can control it from home," Rose says.

The remodel gave the once-ordinary house a striking update — all guided by Dara's sense of design.

Dara, who works in executive communications for AutoDesk in San Rafael, says the remodel came naturally to her.

"My dad, who is also an artist, had a graphic-design business, and I grew up doing art projects at home," she says. "I have always loved art."

Contributing writer Ann Mizel is a longtime Strawberry resident and has been with The Ark since 1987.