

## Victorian cottage makeover creates guesthouse

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Published 4:00 am, Sunday, September 26, 2010



It was an unusual lot in San Francisco's Eureka Valley neighborhood: a main residence that had undergone a recent remodel and an aging cottage at the back of the property that was in need of a generous makeover.

The owner hoped to update the modest Victorian and turn it into an 1,800-square-foot guesthouse for his family, who live overseas and often stay for extended visits.

But the building presented challenges. There was no interior staircase linking the three levels of the building. The owner also anticipated hosting a family member who sometimes used a wheelchair, so the lower level of the structure had to include universal design elements. The city also wanted the exterior of the Victorian preserved. With these requirements in mind, the owner hired Alan and Joy Ohashi of Ohashi Design Studio of Emeryville to tackle the transformation.

"Much of the fabric of the building could be from the 1800s," says Alan Ohashi. "All the doors were original, and there was lots of dry rot in the stairs. But the building also had all of the original detailing - like the Victorian molding - that people love and the city of San Francisco wanted us to maintain. Our goal was to enlarge the building as much as possible, make the top level of the building usable - it had a really weird head height - and mix the Victorian with contemporary elements."

The garden courtyard was an important link between the main residence and the guesthouse. "This was going to be a focal point, because this is really a backyard for both buildings," says Ohashi.

The previous owner had planted a lot of vegetation, so the garden was edited, and some existing trees were incorporated into the new design of the 50-by-20-foot space.

## **Wheelchair-friendly**

A series of ramps with concrete pavers integrated into a stepped garden design provides wheelchair access; one of the ramps from the courtyard leads directly to the guesthouse's updated lower floor.

"There's a lot of flexibility intended with this level," says Ohashi, who included double French doors that open into a bedroom and wheelchair-accessible bathroom with a large, easy-access bathtub. The height of the marble vanity counters is also wheelchair-friendly (with a wheelchair opening in the vanity), and the entire space was created to have a serene, spa-like feel, with large marble tiles on the tub surround and extras like a hand shower.

The lower level also includes an additional back bedroom and a laundry room in an alcove off the hallway.

"The laundry is actually a really nice room," says Ohashi. "We upgraded an existing double-hung window, added lots of built-in storage and good lighting. Big bifold doors allow the laundry room to be closed off, and we included an attractive and waterproof light gray-beige limestone floor."

## **Multiuse main level**

An exterior Victorian-style front staircase leads up to the house's main level, where the removal of interior walls and electrical, plumbing and seismic upgrades allowed for a modern, easy-flow floor plan with an open kitchen, adjacent dining space, family room, separate TV area and powder room.

"Since it's only a 1,800-square-foot house, we wanted to make it feel as big and spacious as possible," Ohashi explains.

The open kitchen includes a center island with stools for casual meals and clean, white Caesarstone countertops that match the perimeter counters. "We wanted a lot of light bouncing around the whole place." A small balcony off the kitchen offers a spot to enjoy a cup of coffee or grill outdoors during nice weather.

The family room off the kitchen is a simple seating area with a cream-colored leather sofa under an upgraded picture window that floods the space with natural light. A sliding Raydoor acrylic partition separates the kitchen and family room from the TV room.

"The sliding door not only stops heat loss but allows you to block the neighbor's view at night, so you have some privacy," explains Ohashi. "It was the client's idea and is a really nice addition to this level of the home."

The same glass, metal and wood elements used for the kitchen's balcony were repeated in the house's new interior stair tower.

"It's a modern expression of the house," says Ohashi. "We kind of felt if we were going to add something new to this Victorian, it should look modern. It's a good thing that San Francisco let us do this so it's not all Victorian - it gives you some wonderful contrast. Before there was no internal link or staircase between the different levels of the building."

The stair tower - which glows at night - features floating wood treads on a steel base, with steel handrails wrapped in the same wood as the floor. Large, three-story windows allow natural light into all three levels of the home.

## **Lowering the floor**

The third floor was previously used as a sleeping loft for the top-floor apartment because it had very low, slanted ceilings. Because the city mandated that the height envelope of the building remain the same, the design solution was to lower the third floor by 1 foot to create headroom.

"Since the lower floor had high ceilings, taking away a foot was not a problem," says Ohashi.

This upper bedroom was fitted with a custom built-in desk and cabinetry, and now includes an operable skylight that adds a feeling of spaciousness. A skylight was also added to the adjoining bathroom. Ohashi says the skylights were a way to add more windows without changing the profile of the building.

"I think within the tough geometry of the space we had, it just transformed it into a light-filled environment, but it also feels Victorian and homey," he explains.

The remodeled structure reflects both the history of San Francisco and a modern interpretation of the blend of styles that makes the city special.

"This was a modest cottage, not an elaborate Victorian," says the owner. "The integration of modern conveniences and updates makes it a much more enjoyable place to live."

## **Design**

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