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“We couldn’t leave



THE LIVING ROOM reflects the owners' desire for "a peaceful environment where we can be comfortable." The throw on the sofa is made from old sweaters. Designer Sasha Emerson found the French coffee table in an antiques store and stained it chocolate. "It's the perfect height for children to color on," she says.

THE GARDEN designed by Rob Steiner harmonizes with existing trees. "In keeping with the house, I used simple, pure forms," he says. These include lantern-topped gateposts and angled steps flanked by New Zealand Christmas tree hedges and shade-tolerant liriop 'Silver Dragon.'

An L.A. family branched out and built a new house in a cottage neighborhood just blocks from their old home

our neighborhood”

PRODUCER SASHA EMERSON PHOTOGRAPHER VICTORIA PEARSON
STYLIST ROBIN TURK WRITER SUSAN HEEGER





SASHA DESIGNED THE DINING TABLE with local craftsman Niall Bourke, using a piece of 200-year-old English mahogany. The spool chandelier dates to the 1930s.

THE 19TH-CENTURY EUROPEAN BENCH beneath the stairwell (left) was a flea market find. Its top lifts for toy storage. The billboard on the landing once hung on a newsstand.

"I'M NOT A PASSIONATE COOK," says Denise (opposite). "I wanted a kitchen where we would all just come to be together." The orange Italian cappuccino maker, red lids on the 1960s ceramic canisters, and aqua stemware add spikes of color.

TWO YEARS OF HOUSE HUNTING can drive you to destruction. Ask Denise and Mark, a Los Angeles couple who finally bought a teardown blocks from their old home and built a new family cottage.

Problem with their previous digs? Tiny lot. Problem with the teardown? Everything except the lot: Mature oaks and sycamores fill the property, situated in a quiet enclave of winding streets. "We love it here, with all the big trees, a great park, and a real feeling of community. We couldn't leave," says Denise, a television writer-producer who, with her producer-husband, has four children between the ages of 1 and 11.

This large family needed space but didn't want to live pretentiously—not in this community where shingled cottages nestle amid the old oaks, and huge homes keep a low profile. Nor could the couple bear to mow down the trees, though they created design challenges. Of the architects they consulted, only one, Marmol Radziner & Associates, eschewed the chain saw, viewing the trees as an exciting opportunity. "It's important to us to connect a house with the natural landscape," says Rot Radziner, who, with his partner, Leo Marmol, and associates Sarita Singh and Daniel Monti, designed a U-shaped structure around the towering trees. The front of the house wraps around an oak: Guests

"WE DIDN'T NEED OR WANT FORMAL SPACES"



DESIGNED FOR SERIOUS WORK AND PLAY, the cork-floored kids' space is furnished with a table and chairs from a 1950s kindergarten—another flea market find. Mexican school posters flank the bulletin board and oak nightstands.

"LIGHT PROVIDES THE REAL DRAMA IN THIS HOUSE," says Denise. Windows in the upstairs hallway (right) overlook a courtyard filled with mature trees—the architect's scheme for saving oaks and sycamores on the lot.



stroll under its arching boughs to reach the door. The architects also included banks of windows and skylights in each room, capturing every possible ray of sun. "Light is crucial to me," says Denise, "as is a certain openness—rooms flowing into others so we can see and hear each other. As I cook, for instance, I like to see the kids playing."

To achieve roominess while ensuring that the house fit its historic neighborhood, the architects married Craftsman bungalow style with a more fluid, contemporary plan. From the street, the house looks cozy and traditional, its sage-green facade melding with the trees and garden, designed by landscape architect Rob Steiner. Inside, it's well suited to a modern family of two boys, two girls, and two involved parents. "We're with our children so much," explains Denise, "that we didn't need or want formal spaces." Instead, they asked for hangouts: rooms where kids and grown-ups could be together, comfortable and occupied.

In the kitchen, which she calls "the command center," steel-topped cabinets and professional-strength appliances gather around a 3½- by 9-foot walnut table designed by the architects. "It all happens right here," says Denise, "everything from games to homework to dinner." Nothing is off-limits to children, including the living room, where low tables attract coloring books, and deep armchairs foster conversation. Even the dining end of this sunny room does double-duty: Its long, mahogany-topped table,

AN HEIRLOOM SLEIGH BED in the kids' room got a modern makeover with zippy fabrics. The red striped rug and lamp made from a Japanese vase add punch. Curtains were sewn from light-blue mattress ticking.



SASHA DESIGNED DENISE AND MARK'S BED with a platform and headboard covered in finely woven green-and-gold chenille. Two tot-size English corner spool chairs invite the children in. A 1960s Danish-modern armchair, covered in striped linen, gets great light for reading.



“WE LAYERED THINGS SLOWLY OVER TIME, BY TRIAL AND ERROR. THIS IS A HOUSE YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO CLUTTER”

designed by Sasha Emerson, seats 14 for dinner parties and also is a prime spot for puzzles and Parcheesi.

Sasha, who helped Denise and Mark furnish their house in a style that she calls “Yankee Modern,” scoured flea markets and antiques shops for a mix of treasures with a “passed-down-through-a-New-England-family” look. Having grown up in the Northeast, the couple had some heirlooms of their own. “We worked on a budget,” says Sasha, “and layered things slowly over time, by trial and error. This is a house you wouldn’t want to clutter.”

Once the major rooms were done, Sasha and Denise spent two years refining them, addressing needs revealed by day-to-day life—a console table behind the sofa, an extra lamp here and there—and adding colorful accents into the largely neutral palette. “We did this carefully,” Sasha says, “knowing that one overly loud element could throw off the balance.” The most harmonious accent hues—for example, the living room’s pottery bowls and mantel vases—are rich blue- and yellow-greens that echo the garden, which is visible through every window. This outdoor landscape, true to the spirit of the house, is both practical and inviting, with places to eat, lounge, and play.

As it turned out, preserving the trees allowed this family to create a private sanctuary. “It’s exactly what we wanted,” Denise says. “It just fits how we live.” ■

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