



The Gilchrist home, a big little cottage, sits on three quarters of an acre and is defined by a front porch, pitched roof and dormers.



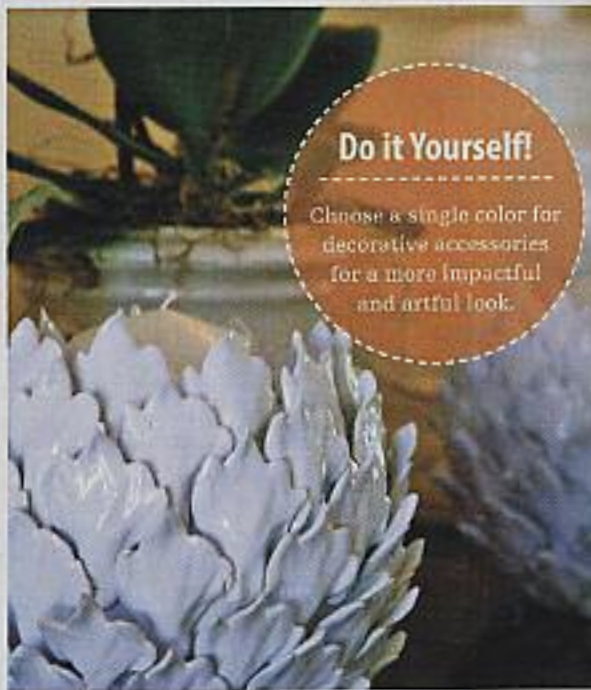


A California couple uses small  
ideas to build a big cottage.

# downsizing

BY NANCY A. BUHLING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY AIDIN MARISCAL





#### Do it Yourself!

Choose a single color for decorative accessories for a more impactful and artful look.

**Above left:** A pair of antique carriage lamps, an Art Deco mirror and a console table take up residence in the front entry.

**Above:** A variety of white pottery, all textured and multifaceted, make an elegant vignette on the entry table.

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WELCOMING FRONT PORCH, A SET OF STORYBOOK DORMERS AND AN OLD-FASHIONED PITCHED ROOF.

These are the things Susie Gilchrist envisioned for her dream house. When she and her husband, John, got the chance to build a new house in the Cowan Heights section of North Tustin, California, her wish list became reality.


"I'm drawn to old homes, and I wanted a house that was traditional and cottagey," Susie says. "I definitely had to have a front porch. You don't see a lot of them here. They are so adorable and remind me of the country."

The Gilchrists have three children, 16-year-old Jack, 14-year-old Leah and 11-year-old Jane; plus Bear, a chocolate Labrador retriever, so even though the idea of a small cottage was appealing, they needed a big house that gives them room to grow.

#### Designing a Dream

To realize their big-small dreams, they turned to architect Carol Tink-Fox of Orange, California-based Stratos Form, who drew upon the past and the present to create a contemporary home that looks like a rambling American farmhouse that evolved through generations of owners.





*In the great room/family room,  
trusses bring the 15-foot ceiling  
down to earth.*

The new house, which is on three-quarters of an acre,  
is designed to look as though it evolved through  
the decades with each generation of inhabitants.





*The peninsular bar divides the great room/family room from the kitchen, linking the two spaces.*





*The kitchen is the hub of the Gilchrist house. An open wide floorplan allows for many people to gather at once, whether to eat at the island, do homework at the computer station or cook on the eight-burner stove.*



**Right:** The breakfast nook is where the family eats most of its meals.

**Opposite:** An 18th-century-style dining table and built-in buffet and china/linen closets are the highlights of the dining room.

To Susie's delight, the single-story, U-shaped main house, set on three-quarters of an acre, has two porches—one in front and one in back. The whole is balanced by a two-story addition that contains the children's bedrooms and a two-story, 380-square-foot guest house, complete with a bedroom, loft-like recreation room and one-car garage, that looks like big barn.

"We liked the way a two-story house looks," Susie says. "But we didn't want our bedroom upstairs because we didn't want to do all that climbing, so we put the kids' bedrooms upstairs instead."

The two additions blend in so well with the main house that they are virtually invisible and they serve to break the space into comfortable, companionable parts that pave the way for an outdoor pavilion and fully equipped outdoor kitchen.

"Susie wanted a house that felt small from the street," Tink-Fox says. "The first impression is that it's only one story. The second story, which is tucked into the back, makes the house physically big, but it looks small and gives the feeling of intimate spaces. And the guest house is detached from the main house and reached by a covered walkway. This helped keep the structure looking small."

#### Natural Floorplans

The house, which is at the end of a cul-de-sac and next door to Peters Canyon Regional Park, offers beautiful woodland views that the Gilchris wanted to showcase. "The challenge was to choose a vista for each room," Tink-Fox says. "The views are park-like, there are lots of rolling hills and one hillside glows golden in the late afternoon."

One of Susie's favorite pastimes is taking hikes in the hills, so she wanted to feel that they were right at her feet. "I love nature," she says. "And I love the fact that we are in a quiet area that is filled with egrets, hawks, roadrunners and quail."

The cottage/farmhouse looks continue on the interior, where Tink-Fox repeated the theme of ample yet cozy spaces. With the children's three bedroom suites in the addition, the main house contains the master bedroom,

living room, dining room, kitchen, great room/family room, breakfast room, mud room, study and laundry room.

"We didn't want a living room," Susie says. "So we have a big family room—it's called the great room—instead. Everything we do is casual entertaining. The dining room is used only for formal holiday dinners."

In the great room, the greatest statement is the bold trusses that were added to the ceiling to humble its 15-foot-height, which was needed to accommodate the dormers that are so dear to Susie's heart.

A variety of built-ins throughout the house as well as an eclectic mix of traditional furnishings impart an old-home









The house's biggest statements are conveyed through the littlest details, just as they would have been if the home really were a small cottage.







**Left:** A bay window turns the large master bedroom into a cozy place, and the robin's egg blue walls tie the sky to the space.

**Below:** The window seat on the stair landing that leads to the children's bedrooms frames a charming view.



### Do it Yourself!

Don't let good space go to waste. Create a cozy nook on a landing or hallway corner. A simple upholstered bench or overstuffed chair paired with a table forms an inviting space that adds an unexpected touch of charm to a home.





*The master bath includes his and her vanities and a tub that is tucked into its own alcove. There are separate spaces for a shower and toilet room.*



This is really my dream house. Everyone who comes says it looks warm and cozy, and that's the biggest compliment I could get.







**Above:** The outdoor pavilion, which is open on three sides, includes a fireplace and flat-screen TV.

**Right:** The outdoor kitchen is outfitted with a grill, sink and a serving counter.

**Opposite:** Brick defines the first-floor powder room, creating a cottage-like feature that links the main house to the children's bedroom wing.



### Smart Spaces

ambience. Susie's heirloom cookbooks, for instance, are artfully arranged in cream-color bookshelves by the refrigerator. And in the dining room, where an 18th-century-style dining table is the focal point, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry displays Susie's Royal Copenhagen china and stores linens as well as the silver flatware her mother gave her.

"I wanted a big window between the cabinets," she says. "And I wanted a buffet counter under it just like the one in my mother-in-law's house. It looks so pretty with my silver tea service on it that I only rarely use it to serve food."

The kitchen, which has the home's only computer, and the great room are prime gathering spots for the family. Although they are separate rooms, they open into each other, encouraging interaction, and are linked by a peninsular bar complete with stools that beg to be sat in.

"The kitchen was designed with the idea that the kids could come in and grab a sandwich or a soda," Tink-Fox says. "And other guests could be there while Susie cooks so she still would feel she's part of everything that's going on."

The kitchen may be the most popular room in the house, but the laundry room is where Susie really likes to be.

"It's my own space," she says. "I'm there all the time. I have a table for folding laundry and doing art projects, wrapping gifts and making my photo albums."

Another spot that draws her is the window seat in the stair landing in the bedroom addition. "We wanted the stairs in the back because it's more casual," she says. "It's the cutest thing in the world. And it's a pretty private space. My daughter likes to play with her dolls there. Sometimes I curl up and read a cookbook. And

I can stop and open the window and shout out to the kids while they are playing in the yard."

The house's biggest statements are conveyed through the littlest details, just as they would have been if the home really were a small cottage. Off the front porch, for instance, there's a bricked-in space that houses a powder room that Susie declares is simply charming.

Susie declares that the house, the first the couple has built from the ground up, is the perfect place to raise a family.

"This really is my dream house," she says. "Everyone who comes says it looks warm and cozy, and that's the biggest compliment I could get. Every time I drive by, I look at the porch and think 'look how cute it is.' It always gives me a happy feeling."





## period details

Architect Carol Tink-Fox used a variety of architectural details to turn the Gilchrist house into a contemporary cottage.

The main features include:

- Dutch doors
- A front and back porch
- Double-hung windows with transom windows
- Dormers
- Exterior shutters that are operable
- Built-ins in the dining room and great room/family room
- Wood-plank wainscoting in the foyer
- Paneled case openings into the great room/family room
- Brickwork details on the shingled exterior.

