

# RENOVATION STYLE

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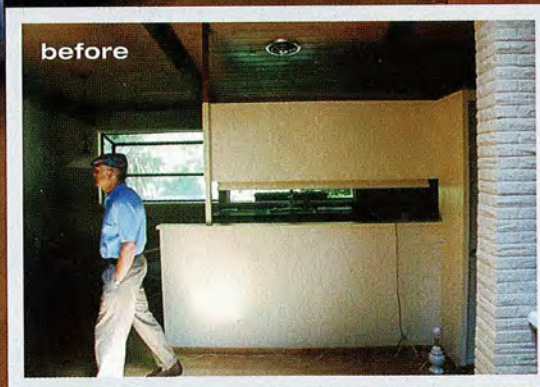
by mindy pantiel photography by michael jensen produced by linda humphrey

Tipping the roof upward exposes a dark, low-slung ranch to the sky and beauty of the surrounding landscape.





PAGES 108-109: Besides supporting a new breezeway, sturdy wood posts echo the nearby trees. THIS PHOTO: Tall custom windows and a materials mix transform a previously uninterrupted wall of glass. The arrangement makes a pleasing visual statement.



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Putting a new spin on Tony Bennett was not what San Franciscans Connie Cservenyak and Ken Hite set out to do. But after one look from the couple, a wooded neighborhood near Seattle won their hearts and they left the city by the Bay.

The couple fell in love with the 1.3-acre home-sites adjacent to a state park zoned for equestrian use, a place where they could keep their horses and their dogs could roam free. Connie and Ken were so determined to live there that they put their real estate agent on 24-hour alert. "There are only 28 houses in the development and they don't become available very often," Connie explains. "When we heard one was going on the market the next Monday, we immediately flew up and made a compelling offer the Friday before."

The couple quickly settled into their 1952 rambler. Then they realized that while the heavily wooded property was canine and equine Nirvana, their own digs had some major shortcomings. "It had good bones, but it was extremely dark, and the bedrooms were very small," Connie says.

They toughed it out for a year before taking their concerns to Mark Elster of AOME Architects, who validated their assessment. "Besides being dimly dark, the house didn't take advantage of the features of the property," he says. "It had a chopped-up floor plan that made the medium-size house feel small, and for people who love to entertain, it had a kitchen that was totally divorced from the rest of the house."

And then there was the roof. Typical of ramblers from that era, the house sported a low,

sloping single gable that ran along the axis of the linear structure, resulting in low overlaps on both sides. "It was like being in a house with dropping eyelids," Elster says. "I had to bend down to see out, and instead of seeing the beautiful, soaring trees, all I saw was tree trunks."

When the architect presented his clients with what seemed like the only solution—take the roof off and raise the wall height—the owners vetoed his plan on grounds that the costly maneuver would eat up half of their renovation budget. Back at the drawing board, Elster determined a similar effect could be achieved by raising just parts of the roof. The new plan called for a single-slope shed roof that rises to 12 feet above two sets of doors along the home's rear facade. "We went from replacing the whole roof to saving 80 percent of it," he says.

The roof dilemma solved, Elster moved on to dealing with a massive floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace wall that cut off the living room and restricted the view. Taking down the unsightly partition and expanding the sight lines through the soaring window wall was a no-brainer, but the design and placement of a new fireplace proved more complicated.

"Fireplaces in the Northwest are problematic because the environment is so beautiful you don't want the two to compete," says Elster, who ultimately placed the fireplace at a 90-degree angle to the windows. "The furniture is arranged to access the view by day and the fire by night, depending on where you sit."

ABOVE: Interior designer Kathleen Williams selected the hard-surface finishes, while architect Mark Elster selected the sandstone for the window-wall surround. The homeowners, with Williams' help, selected the milestone, a faux plaster, for the fireplace and lintel above the doorway. The fireplace form repeats the roof geometry, only in reverse, and gains distinction from a custom copper mantel. OPPOSITE: The original galley kitchen isolated homeowner Ken Hite, who loves to cook. Now friends gather at the raised cedar-and-granite island.

#### window wisdom

Window walls were critical to making the long facade of this contemporary home work. "The key is setting up a rhythm of groupings that are repeated," architect Mark Elster says. "But if there are budget constraints, you need to be careful and use more costly custom windows only where you get the most bang for the buck."

In this case, that meant placing the more expensive openings, modulated with wood mullions and stone, in the most prominent spaces in the house—the living room and master bedroom. Standard windows, meanwhile, went into the kitchen, dining room, and guest room. "We made the parts of the house we couldn't spend as much money on recede to the background," Elster says.

The roofline played a big role in Elster's strategy. "Tall spaces take on more importance and lower spaces take on less," he says, "and here the ceiling height and windows come together to put the attention on the living room, where it belongs."



Placing the dining room under a low section of the roofline resulted in a cozy entertaining space. Throughout the house the ceiling is fashioned from superstrong 2x6 car decking.



To provide contrast with the surrounding walls, the new hearth is topped with synthetic Venetian plaster. "If the fireplace is the same material as the wall, it loses its status as an object in the room," says Elster, who included a custom copper mantel and flue in the design. When the homeowners opted to place their TV over the mantel, they commissioned the metalworker to wrap the bevel in matching copper to make the large flat-panel television appear less dominant.

Removing the wall that enclosed the existing galley kitchen was another necessity, as was making the now-open space visually appealing from the adjacent rooms. "Kitchens really are messy places, and in an open plan you need to mitigate that," Elster says. He organized the appliances into one grouping to form a "stainless-steel design wall" and raised a portion of the island countertop 9 inches to screen the cooking zone.

Also critical to the overall transformation was a new master suite, which took the place of an existing carport. After tearing down the simple covering and its four support posts, a scaled-down model of the main house was constructed to fill the 541 square feet.

"It has the same soaring roofline and view" as the living room, says Elster, who also tied the old and new forms together with a remodeled entry. "The front door is in the same place, but we covered it with a smaller version of the shed roof tipped the opposite way to create a low and sheltering space."

With construction almost complete, Elster faced one more challenge, as the homeowners decided they wanted a new garage. The architect came up with a simple rectangle that doesn't overwhelm the architecture and, in fact, manages to define the drive and entry courts. "Before it was hard to find the front door," Elster says. "The garage actually enhances the way to the entry."

Now guests can easily find their path to the place that lured Connie and Ken away from the Bay—and see why this couple followed their hearts to Seattle. ■

Architect: Mark Elster

Interior designer: Kathleen Williams

For more information, see Resources on page 118.

ABOVE LEFT: The same stone and window pattern established in the living room is repeated in the master suite, which is housed in a new mini replica of the main house. OPPOSITE: With raised rooflines, the master bedroom (left) and living room (right) have abundant natural light. Both rooms have direct patio access.

