

# This Old House

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# A Little More Open,

THIS PAGE: A front-to-back reno added space and flow to this one-story 1930s house. Along the way, the oak floors were patched and refinished and the decor became clean and airy, with bursts of color.

OPPOSITE: The original front door has a screened inset and a speakeasy panel that opens to catch breezes.





# a Lot More Livable



Small adjustments inside plus a deck addition out back allow a beloved vintage house to realize its potential

By **Deborah Baldwin**  
Photographs by **Gregg Segal**  
Produced by **Nicole Esposito-Polly**  
Styling by **Andie Black**

**You've heard about pregnant women** falling in love with their obstetricians? Then you know how Patrick McGee and Sally Bartow feel about the surgical team that handled their renovation, delivering a dwelling with perfect features after only eight months of hard labor.

**RIGHT:** Opened up and redesigned, the kitchen gained display space for colorful pottery and a strategic spot for neighborhood gadabout Oliver. Refrigerator: Liebherr. Tile: Wizard Enterprise Bison Brick. Sink: Rohl. Faucets: Waterstone. Pendant light: Rejuvenation

**OPPOSITE:** A new deck off the kitchen is an invitation to step outside and take in cinematic views of downtown L.A.



Words like “wonderful” come up a lot, along with “amazing” and “then you see it and you say, ‘Oh my gosh!’”

The couple had put off remodeling for a very long time, ignoring their lone, dated bath and narrow Depression-era kitchen while juggling long-distance jobs and two young daughters. Sally says simply, “It had what we needed.” Says Patrick, “It was a sweet house, with a sweet side porch, the house we brought our baby girls home to.”

Then suddenly, as these things happen, the girls were all grown up and the 1930s stucco Spanish Revival, perched above downtown Los Angeles in the Silver Lake neighborhood, began to look a little needy—especially if you ask Sally.

“It was our house, you know, and it was perfect for one or two,” Patrick says, speaking from Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he is often on location as a co-executive producer of the TV crime drama *Longmire*. He adds: “We had a nice old O’Keefe &



Merritt range, and everybody wants one of those because they are so cool.”

“Everybody but me,” Sally interjects good-humoredly, on the phone from Mercer Island, Washington, where she teaches high school when not in L.A. “I wanted a kitchen that wasn’t from the 1930s, I wanted to love being in it, I was ready to cook on something modern.”

She also confesses to having harbored a desire for a different ambience in the common areas, which during her school-year absences had veered toward L.A. man cave, or “Boy Scout chic,” as the couple’s architectural designer, Karen Vidal, recalls thinking the first time she visited.

Patrick, whom everyone calls Pat, concedes that his collection of offbeat family heirlooms, coupled with a flea market habit, had yielded “layered” arrangements of everything from brass goblets and wood trinkets to doll heads. “Not as scary as a set from *Seven*, but a little horror-ish.”

The neighborhood itself has a vintage-Hollywood feel. “We were initially attracted to Silver Lake and the house through our fascination with historical Los Angeles,” Pat recalls, conjuring up Raymond Chandler and 1930s film noir. “We would breakfast on Saturdays on Sunset Boulevard and spend the afternoon driving through the oldest neighborhoods in town.

“When we found this little hillside bungalow, in 1986, it felt sort of perfect. It was across the street from one of the old public stairs that knit up the neighborhood, and featured canyon views that looked out over the downtown skyline. There was even a phone niche in the hallway that could have accommodated only one of those vintage stand-up phones. And we could—just—afford it.”

They didn’t do much to the house at the time. They took down a large mirror, added furniture, and wiggled a TV stand into a corner of the living room, where it blocked a pretty window. And thus things stood.

When the girls were just 3 and 6, Pat landed work in Seattle—as an assistant director of *Northern Exposure*—and Sally found work there too. They bought a second house, a ’60s ranch, on Mercer Island, and again did little to it beyond having Home Depot honcho a bath and IKEA put its stamp on the



## FLOOR PLAN

The reno of the 1,300-square-foot house annexed about 150 square feet of side-porch space, allowing a larger, open kitchen and second bath; a rear bumpout added a 39-square-foot dressing room, plus a 172-square-foot deck with stairs to the patio below.





**ABOVE LEFT: Homeowner Pat McGee grabs a seat in a living room reading nook.**

**ABOVE RIGHT: A new hallway niche brings order to the couple's flea market finds, honoring them with salvaged-wood shelves.**

**OPPOSITE: Artful cement floor tile, hand-glazed wall tile, and a curvy tub dress up the guest bath. Floor tile: Granada Tile. Wall tile: Ceramic Concepts (custom color). Tub: Victoria + Albert. Tub filler: Sunrise Specialty. Sink and faucet: Kohler**



kitchen. They might both still be there if Pat hadn't been lured back to L.A. by TV projects like *Nip/Tuck* and, more recently, *Bosch*.

Finally, nearly 30 years after first moving in and still working far afield, they were ready to renovate in L.A. and turned to Vidal. The attraction was partly chemistry, partly driven by her firm's ability to dispatch every design-and-build detail.

Vidal lives nearby and says the house, with its modest facade and hidden depth, is typical of Silver Lake. "It's very hilly," she says, "so it's not uncommon to see an unassuming front and then the house goes back and down; it looks like nothing, then—wow!" Houses tend to be Spanish Revival or Craftsman or a bit of both, she says, with the living room in front and two bedrooms flanking a shared bath.

This one ended by just falling off in back, with no route to the rear patio except by way of the side porch and a faltering set of stairs. That drawback, among others, caught her eye. The house had a rear view, after all, if it could be opened up to catch sight of it.

Soon Vidal, working with production architect Esteban Garcia, was mapping out options. The process proved engaging to two absentee homeowners who hadn't realized how much fun it could be to tinker with a house they already loved very much.

"What we told Karen was we don't want a bigger

house, we just want more livable, workable space," Pat says. Adds Sally, "The proportions are lovely, and I must say she completely got it."

Though she did have to bring them around to the notion of a second bath. "There's no room for it, how would it even work, it's going to make the kitchen too small!" Pat recalls telling Vidal. "Then she calls in a friend, a Realtor, actually it could have been an extra from central casting—she was there in one minute," he continues, laughing, "and she was 'Oh my goodness, you *have* to do it, this is what everyone wants, a two-bedroom, two-bath house,'" and of course, Sally concludes, "it was completely the right decision."

Vidal began in the back and bumped out, grafting on a deck and dressing room atop an arched old-world arcade. "That was big, being able to just walk outside and enjoy," she says. To smooth the path from the kitchen to the newly enlarged patio, she added rear stairs with terra-cotta treads and tiled risers, Spanish Revival style. Along the way, the team put in new wiring and plumbing, and rebuilt the sagging side stairs—the foundation and original terra-cotta roof were mainly in good shape.

To ease traffic jams and add function, Vidal annexed the side porch, allowing for a larger kitchen and behind it that second bath. Original windows

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and doors were moved around to capitalize on light streaming into the kitchen and master bedroom, where Vidal squeezed in a dressing room. “I love waking up and looking out the window—I wanted to see the sunrise,” says Sally. “By George, she put a window in the closet!”

Vintage-style light fixtures, colorful tile, and warm-white walls brighten the house and provide contained space for Pat’s collectibles. After a lengthy debate over placement of the TV—Vidal really wanted to hang it inside an existing bookcase, he preferred to keep it on a cart—Pat at last agreed to roll it away from its old spot blocking the window.

Before, “the house felt masculine,” Sally says. “Karen made it possible for both of us to be comfortable.” Or as Pat puts it, “She was very good at figuring out what the house was about and what our relationship with the house wanted to be.”

Today, visiting friends and family can spill onto the deck and down to the patio. “It’s a surprise just how much we enjoy being in that house and having those views and the flow—it’s a lovely space,” says Pat. And before he can finish the thought, Sally chimes in, this time in total agreement: “Yeah!”

**ABOVE: Reworking the back of the house allowed the master bedroom to gain a dressing room with an arched opening. The striped blanket is a vintage Saltillo. Striped pillowcases: Target. Orange pillow: Lulu & Georgia. Quilt: West Elm**

**RIGHT: Tiled risers and traditional Mexican terra-cotta treads—stained to look weathered—add character to the rebuilt side stairs. Tile (custom): Ceramic Concepts**

**OPPOSITE: The deck sits above a Mediterranean-style arcade—shade when the sun is hot. Containers: Pottedstore.com**





