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Fresh Digs

Inspiration and excavation turn a boxy bungalow into a three-level showcase of clean lines, bold color, and easy indoor-outdoor flow.

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When it comes to overachieving, the Little Engine that Could of storybook fame has nothing on fashion photographer Lisa Loftus and her contractor husband, Tod Clark. The couple found a way to more than double the size of their 1,400-square-foot home in San Diego without widening the footprint or adding an upper level. Their secret? Two new levels tucked below the existing main level, a solution that netted 2,000 square feet of space.

In Lisa Loftus and Tod Clark's California home, large windows, clean lines, and a vaulted ceiling make the living room feel larger than its size. Furnishings set a comfortably contemporary tone.

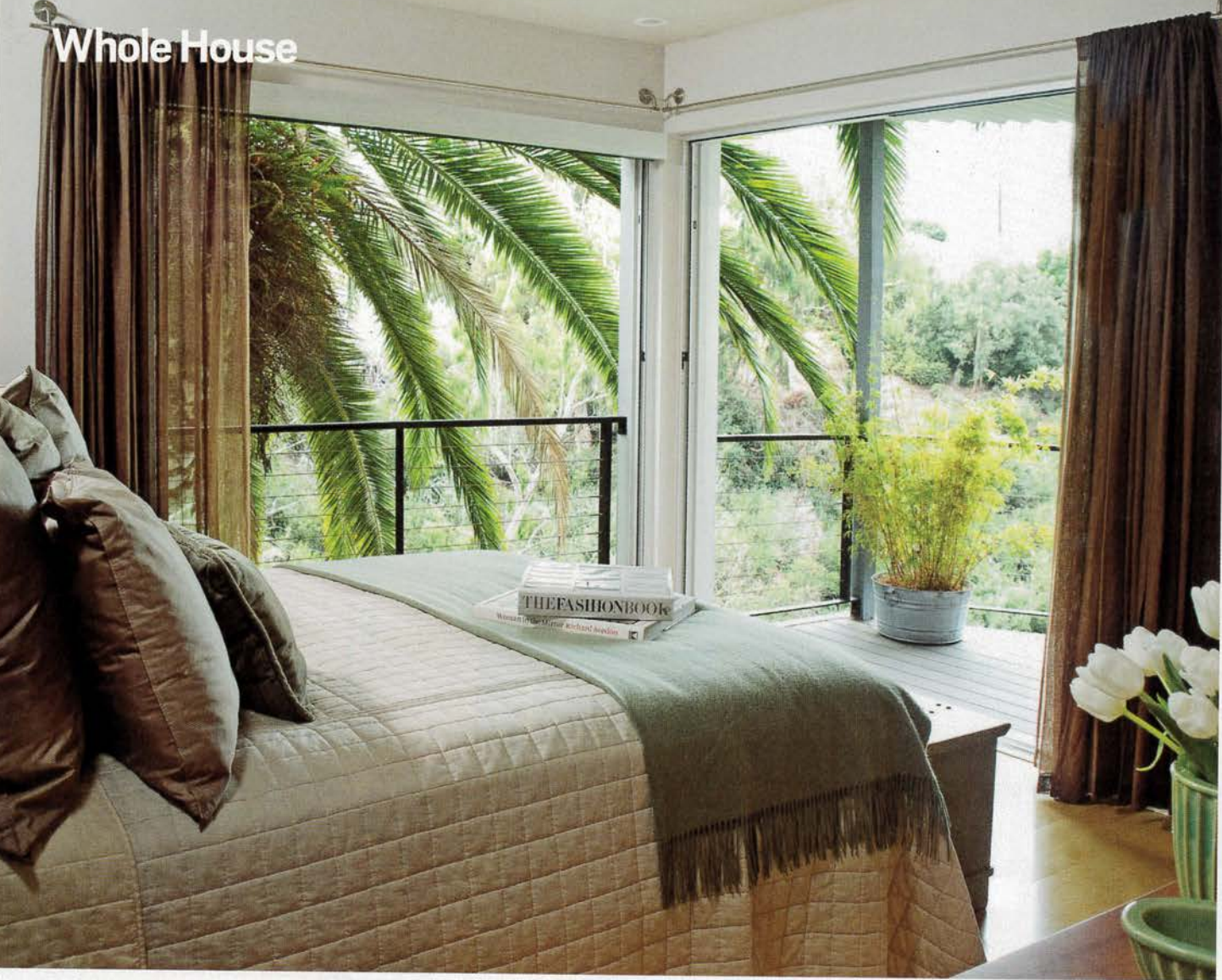


Lisa and Tod lived with their 1952 Craftsman-style bungalow for six years before deciding to dig into a remodeling project—literally: They pulled nearly 100 cubic yards of earth from beneath the house, one meticulous load at a time. Talk about “I think I can” spirit. Given the fragile canyon site and its steep 45 percent grade, hand excavation was the only practical option, says Tod, who owns a drilling company and knows tough terrain.

As they removed underground sections, Tod and his crew gingerly shored up the existing structure with new footings and slabs. “The logistics were complicated,” he says. “After pouring the footings for the exterior walls, we actually brought in eight house jacks and eight of my closest friends to raise the west side of the house by 5 inches. Now that was an adventure.”

ABOVE Skylights and a corrugated metal ceiling echo in the frosted glass and aluminum front door. **RIGHT** A glass-top dining table, transparent chairs, and glass deck doors reflect a desire for openness. **OPPOSITE** In the kitchen, birch cabinets, sleek pulls, and the island's swath of color fit the modern vibe.





The hard-won new space is only part of the reason the home lives bigger for the couple and their beloved cat, Buddy. Architect Taal Safdie's strategic design opens much of the home to the tree-dotted San Diego hillsides through expansive windows, doors, and decks.

"The home had been remodeled about 15 years ago and was chopped up," Tod says. "It was a two-bedroom, two-bath home with a spiral staircase leading downstairs to a semifinished space. That lower level was supported by a 2-foot-thick retaining wall added in 1989. Now what used to feel inward and compartmentalized is expansive, just like living in a tree house."

Adds Lisa: "We wanted things to disappear, to make everything as unobtrusive as possible so it would be all about the view." Even furniture pieces, such as transparent chairs and a glass table, help preserve clear sight lines.

Safdie (daughter of famed architect Moshe Safdie) knew exactly how to blur the boundaries between indoors and out. "By adding the perimeter

deck space on multiple levels, plus disappearing pocket doors, everything completely opens up to the canyons," she says. Creating a pitched roof outside and higher ceilings inside made the spaces feel much bigger and grander than they actually are, Safdie adds.

Both inside and out, the architect integrated many durable, hip, and affordable features: galvanized roofing, marine hardware railings, concrete countertops and floors, and fiber-cement siding. A lower-level patio incorporates a fire pit, a wall designed for sitting, and a metal countertop encircling a tree—it's dubbed the "Saturn bar" for its ring configuration.

Speaking of outer space, Tod conjured a few out-there touches of his own. In the guest bath, horizontal acrylic rods embedded in the exterior wall admit light and create interesting effects at night. "I knew this corner was going to be dark and thought this would be a fun way to lighten it up," Tod says. In the master bath, Tod added an unexpected ceiling-mount tub filler. He even

ABOVE The master bedroom features expansive glass, including sliding doors to a wood-composite deck overlooking the canyon.

OPPOSITE TOP In the master bath, glass, stone, and concrete maintain a modern look while connecting the room to its canyon backdrop.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM For an open-air feel, the master shower has two doors, including one to the deck.

smart strategy

Pitching the roof and raising ceiling heights made the kitchen and other main rooms feel larger without increasing their square footage.





The home takes full advantage of the favorable climate and natural scenery, letting the couple live as one with the outdoors.



Edgy Exterior

Rather than play it safe—and risk having a ho-hum home—Tod Clark and Lisa Loftus embraced a bold exterior, choosing colors, shapes, and materials designed to grab attention and convey cool contemporary style. Here's what it took:

- **A red brush of courage.** The home's spirited paint color, *above* and *right*, resulted from give and take and trial and error. Tod tried dozens of red shades while Lisa was out of town. "I finally settled on one," he says. "When she returned, the first thing she said is, 'I won't live in an orange house!' Instead she found a picture of a red purse in a magazine—she is a fashion photographer—and presented it to the painting contractor. They made a custom color to match and even decided to save it as a stock hue."
- **Gee-whiz geometry.** The interplay of geometric elements energizes the exterior. On the guest bath's exterior wall, *above right*, acrylic rods punctuate the concrete with a grid pattern of circles, providing a fun counterpoint to the rectangular window.
- **Commercial-chic materials.** Tod and Lisa bypassed home centers and sought out industrial materials, such as corrugated metal and marine cable railing, *right*, for the decks. "Because transparency was a priority for us, we liked the way the cables virtually disappear from view yet still provide a barrier," Tod says.



found a place to display a vintage Victorian shoe unearthed during the excavation.

The cherry on top of the multilayer project is the vivid red exterior color. Tod says Safdie and her husband/business partner, Ricardo Rabines, suggested the color. "Their vision was that of a little red jewel perched on the edge of a lush green canyon," Tod says. "The idea was quite surprising at first, but the way they described their vision sold us within about 10 minutes. We have never regretted the decision."

Tod says a home's exterior color makes the first impression on people when they pass by or visit. "It speaks to the owners' personality, their sense of style," he says. "To us, red is warm, welcoming, and of course unique."

Whether they're enjoying it inside or outdoors, the couple love their remodeled home. To Lisa, the joy comes from flinging open all of the doors and feeling like she's one with the canyon.



For Tod, the best spot is the patio. "Being under the palm canopy on a hot summer afternoon or in the evening with a fire in the fire ring is just magical," he says. "We never really had a reason to go down into the canyon before the remodel, but as we started to spend more time there as the project progressed, we really fell in love with the space. When we entertain, it becomes an extension of the house."

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ABOVE What looks from the front like a small bungalow is actually a spacious three-level home. The color, house numbers, and garage door hint at what's inside.

PROBLEM

A couple's 1,400-square-foot home lacked space indoors and out, failed to take advantage of canyon views, and didn't reflect their contemporary style.

SOLUTIONS

- **Excavating below the home** enabled the couple to add square footage without widening the footprint or building on top of the existing structure.
- **Large windows and sliding doors** open the home to San Diego's inviting views and climate and provide easy access to outdoor areas.
- **Raising ceilings** in the main living areas increased the perceived spaciousness of the rooms without changing their actual square footage.
- **A bold red exterior** conveys the couple's spirited personalities and contemporary tastes.
- **Industrial-look materials** reinforce the modern look while providing strength and durability.
- **Clean-lined furnishings** incorporate glass, metal, and geometric shapes to create contemporary comfort.

