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Designer Kathleen Navarra gave a kid-friendly house in Piedmont a sophisticated makeover, p. 92

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*table for two*

Empty nesters transform their beloved family home in the East Bay into a luxurious grown-up retreat.

BY ERIN FEHER PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN

The kitchen of Mary Robinson and Tim Flato went from a well-worn family hub to a tranquil culinary showpiece, thanks to a redesign by Kathleen Navarra, who added creamy white cabinetry, new appliances and a downsized center island.



**n**early 20 years ago, Mary Robinson and Tim Flato and their three young children moved into a 1904 Craftsman on a tree-lined street in Piedmont. It had a gigantic kitchen with an island perfect for serving hurried breakfasts and a grassy, fenced-in backyard where the kids could run wild. Over the next two decades the house served the family selflessly, allowing its walls to be scratched and nicked, its grass to be trampled and its maple floors to lose their gloss. So when the couple's last child, following in the footsteps of his two older siblings, traded his bedroom for a cramped (but liberating) dorm room 3,000 miles away, the couple began to look at their beloved home with fresh eyes. "We let them bang the place up for while, and now it was time to create the perfect home for just the two of us," says Robinson, who never considered downsizing even after the children moved out. "We love this house, and we aren't going anywhere."

Love may be blind, but the couple could clearly see that the house was in need of some professional help. First they brought in Oakland landscape designer Nancy Kent to help them turn their backyard—with a splintered old deck and patches of dirt where the grass refused to grow back after the thousandth game of soccer—into a grown-up retreat with a stone patio, a hot tub, an outdoor dining area, flowering bushes and trees, and, of course, new bright-green grass. When they mentioned they were looking for someone to handle the interiors, Kent recommended Kathleen Navarra, a San Francisco-based designer and the co-owner of *Jak Home*, a charming furnishings shop in Pacific Heights. "We



On Mary's wish list was an office of her own. With the extra room salvaged from the kitchen, Navarra was able to create a highly functional space that matched the look of the surrounding rooms.

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checked out her website and saw so many projects that we loved," says Robinson. "We decided to just trust her and let her do her thing."

The couple approached Navarra with a very limited list of requests that included adding a tub to their master bath and shrinking the oversize kitchen island. "When Kathleen and her assistant first came over to check out the house, her assistant exclaimed, 'That's not an island; that's a continent!'" recalls Robinson, who knew instantly that they were all on the same page. Navarra also got an immediate sense that they would work well together: "I presented them with a few options for the kitchen, and they ended up going with the most radical one. I said, 'I like them already!'"

Navarra opted to reduce the square footage of the kitchen, which shares one large open space with the breakfast area and family rooms, but optimize its efficiency.

The family room's brick red wall color was inspired by the pops of red in the Osborne & Little fabric that Navarra chose for the sofa's accent pillows and the breakfast nook banquette (not pictured).

Because Robinson loves to cook, Navarra had a blast tricking out the kitchen with hidden details, such as a sliding cabinet door alongside the new Wolf cooktop that holds all of

Robinson's oils, spices and vinegars. Her Kitchen Aid mixer also has its own cabinet, which raises up to counter height when it's time to bake. Trash and recycling bins are hidden but at the ready, and a new diminutive island, with a butcher-block top and bar seating for two, gives Robinson plenty of room to prepare meals or just hang out. "The kitchen is just so pretty now. I actually love to come down here in the morning and read a book," says Mary. The pretty factor was upped with gray-and-white Calacatta marble tiles, new windows above the sink that mirror the century-old detailing of the originals throughout the rest of the house and white beadboard walls lining a cozy breakfast nook.

## ***“Once we had the contractors here, it was pretty easy for us to say, ‘Let’s just keep going.’”***


The breakfast nook, its banquette upholstered in a graphic Osborne & Little fabric with pops of brick red, replaced an imposing dining table that separated the kitchen from the family room. With the table gone and some square footage snatched back from the kitchen, the family room was suddenly much larger. Navarra tapped into some of that new space to give Robinson one last thing she was dreaming of—her own office area with ample storage. Navarra designed the desk and built-in shelving to match the kitchen cabinets, while the beadboard accents and bold red walls connect it to the family room. “I would never have picked out that red in a million years. But that’s exactly why we hired Kathleen. We absolutely love it,” says Robinson of the vivid paint color that now coats the walls in the family room. Navarra says it was inspired by the Osborne & Little fabric, which shows up again in throw pillows on the family room’s wheat-colored sectional sofa.

Despite the dust and noise during the

months of renovation, the couple was so pleased with the results that they asked Navarra to continue designing straight through to the downstairs living room. “Once we had contractors here, it was pretty easy for us to say, ‘Let’s just keep going,’” says Robinson. “Because as we all know, once contractors go away, it can be hard to get them back.” Navarra transformed the living room from a “Miami-esque” peach-and-aqua parlor into a sunny sitting room with Moroccan influences. The rug features a quatrefoil pattern, which is repeated in some of the fabrics and furnishings. Many of the couple’s existing pieces were incorporated, thanks to new upholstery and paint. A pair of classic Donghia wicker chairs was stained a dark brown to match reupholstered cushions, while another existing chair lost its skirt, had its legs refinished and was covered in light-blue patterned fabric. French doors swing open to the stone patio outside. “We spend so much more time outside now,” says Robinson. “And

After the kitchen, the penultimate transformation occurred in the master bathroom, which formerly had no bathtub. Navarra rectified that and took over a closet to make room for a double vanity.



A photograph of a modern shower area. The walls are covered in light-colored rectangular subway-style tiles. A large, vertical rectangular inset features a herringbone pattern of light-colored tiles, framed by a dark mosaic border. In the center of this inset is a built-in, recessed shelf with two levels, containing a white bottle of soap and a bar of soap. A glass shower enclosure with chrome hardware is visible on the left and right. A showerhead is mounted on the wall above the inset. In the foreground, a white sink and a vase of white tulips are partially visible.

While the shower now splits its duties with a new tub, it has been updated with enough alluring features to keep it doing brisk business: double showerheads, marble floor tiles and a herringbone accent wall inset with a niche.

The backyard received a major overhaul by landscape designer, Nancy Kent; Navarra gave the adjacent living room an easy update with new paint, fabrics, decorative accessories and wide French doors that connect it to the patio.







Navarra updated and emphasized many of the original details of the 1904 Craftsman (above), such as the rustic brick-lined fireplace, graceful curved ceiling and leaded windows in the living room (top).

because Tim can see the television when the French doors are open, he likes to sit outside at the table and watch the Giants game. I'm

sure the neighbors love that," she laughs.

The new master bath, a tranquil vision in pale blue, white and gray, offers a bit more privacy. Navarra nearly doubled the size of the formerly long-and-narrow bathroom by taking over a closet from the couple's bedroom. Their new tub is topped with marble in a swirling gray-and-white pattern and is lined with smoky gray tiles. The Calacatta marble floor tiles, the same ones that show up in the kitchen, provide a pleasing contrast with the dark wood of the his-and-her vanities.

Even the kids' bathroom got an upgrade, which will be a treat when they come home for holidays or summer vacation. "We were finally able pick materials without worrying about them getting destroyed," says Robinson, who opted for a ceramic beadboard surround for the tub in their bath. "It was so refreshing to be able to make these choices just for us." ■