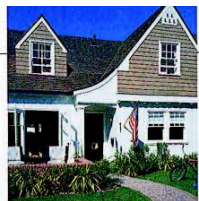


Two California designers reveal their secrets for creating big-space style without supersizing the house.



# just the right size



In the heart of Newport Beach, California, lies a secret lane. On this cottage-lined "walk street" (really a sidewalk, as there is no road), residents leave doors wide open and chat over fences. Shannon and John, the latest homeowners here, purchased a new 2,300-square-foot house that fits in with the neighboring homes—some built more than 80 years ago.

"It's important to build in accordance with the size of



Designer Kate Wilger's refined cottage look utilizes timeless neutral colors, allowing Shannon (who says her tastes change often) to experiment with colorful, versatile accessories. Inset: The great room's double French doors yield an effortless transition into the courtyard, doubling the space for entertaining. Brick floors and beachy textures add to the illusion of being outdoors.

TEXT BY SUSAN C. KIM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUGLAS HILL  
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Common decorating themes help connect the spaces. Kate used dark-wood dining pieces (near right) and dark accents in the kitchen (below) and master bedroom and bath (far right). "Everyone knows that if they work with me, they need to buy a can of black spray paint," Kate jokes.



"The rooms borrow colors from each other, which creates the illusion of flowing space."

—designer Kate Wilger

surrounding homes. Otherwise, it destroys the integrity of the neighborhood," says Mark Becker, who designed the home that Shannon and John bought at the end of the construction process. He planned the house to "look small from the outside, but feel spacious on the inside." With that in mind, designer Kate Wilger helped Shannon and John sync the home's interiors to their beach-centric lifestyle. Mark and Kate share their tips on how to create generous living spaces in a small-scale home.

**• TAKE IT OUTSIDE.** If you've got it, flaunt it—a backyard, that is. Mark chose

not to include a formal eating area in the kitchen to make room for a grassy plot. "The backyard is just like another room, except without walls and a ceiling," he says. By adding an outdoor fireplace and a barbecue grill large enough to make Bobby Flay drool, Mark created the ultimate entertaining space. "We love being outside, so this is perfect for us," raves Shannon, who grew up hanging out at The Wedge, a famous surf beach nearby. "We can hear the waves and smell the fresh ocean air just sitting out here."

With the beach only two blocks away, sand and salt are

frequent visitors, so the plan also includes an outdoor shower. The wide rain showerhead conveniently washes off sand-encrusted kids (and adults), surfboards, and toys after a day at the shore.

**• CONNECT THE DOTS.** "Common themes make a room feel larger by connecting elements to other rooms," says Kate. "Otherwise, there is a disconnect between spaces, which makes the rooms feel more enclosed." Following her own advice, she punctuated the home with dark, elegant furniture, such as a Tibetan cabinet and deep-colored tables and chairs.

One way to ensure consistency, says Kate, is to consider items carefully before purchasing. "I told Shannon and John to pick three words that describe what they want their decor to embody," she says. "They chose 'upscale,' 'elegant,' and 'beach.' Each time they want to buy a piece to add to the house, they should ask themselves if the item fits all three words." That way, everything reflects a common sensibility.

Mark appreciates the "common theme" philosophy, too. He designed a brick path that starts at the front sidewalk, curves up to the main entrance, works its way



## HOMES

through the first-floor rooms, glides onto the backyard patio, meanders past the outdoor shower, and ends at the garage. The board-and-batten siding, typically used on exteriors, transitions onto the interior walls, as well. "It's easy to forget whether you're inside or out," says John, who also likes the brick floors because he can "just hose the sand right out of the house."

### • BE SMART ABOUT THE SUN.

The movement and amount of sunlight may dictate certain design elements. In Mark's plan, a steeply pitched roof allows plenty of light onto the walkway below. Without such cottagelike rooflines, he says, "the street would look like a dark, urban alley instead of a sunny lane." Thanks to carefully sited windows, the slanted ceilings do not lessen the spacious feel of interior rooms.

Mark also left the front patio open to the sun. "There's no need for an overhang here because the light hits the porch in the morning, when it needs the warmth," he says.

Inside and out, Mark and Kate's "big space" techniques make the house feel airy and open. It's simple logic: Don't build features that are not necessary. "There are plenty of ways to add spaciousness without adding square footage," Mark says. "It's all about smart design." 🌿

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☀️ Sunlight warms the front porch and floods the dining room with natural light. Here, Shannon, baby Chad, John, and Spencer chat with Mark Becker (far right).



Belvue House, Newport Beach