



From top: A picture window frames the magnolia that commands the garden and was one of the home's selling points; shades of blue in the living room and kitchen hint at the owner's favorite color.

## BRANCHING OUT

Rasmussen/Su thinks big for an expansive site on a small street.

*By Beth D'Addona // Photography by Jeffrey Totaro*



Come next spring, the towering saucer magnolia tree on tiny Clymer Street in Bella Vista will be in full bloom, a riot of giant pink blossoms rising above Suzanne Simons' three-story home. But when Simons bought the double rowhouse and three adjacent lots for parking and a garden, everything was in sad shape. Chopped up into apartments and packed with stuff, the place didn't even take advantage of the site's potential for letting in daylight or showcasing the views of the tree that had first captivated her.

Still, she was intrigued by the prospect and ready to invest in a renovation that would meet the practical, functional and aesthetic needs of her family, a haven in which they could all live and where she could work. The resulting 18-monthlong project, designed by architects Kevin Rasmussen and Vivian Su of Rasmussen/Su ([rasmussen-su.com](http://rasmussen-su.com)), accomplished all of that and more, creating a domestic oasis populated with Simons' collection of pop and contemporary art and offering a series of spaces that allows the family's life to ebb and flow.

The back of the house is now a cascade of large floor-to-ceiling wall-to-wall custom windows punctuated by a steel beam, a heft of industrial chic that carries into the open great room. So much light floods the rooms, in fact, that Simons



decided to install remote-controlled blinds. “I hardly ever use them, though,” she says. “I’m all about the light.”

That love of light acted as the driver behind a dramatic staircase, featuring railings from local metalworker Bill Curran, that winds up to a third-floor office and ends in a transparent wraparound bookcase lined with Plexiglas. Fabricated by cabinetmaker Pappajohn Woodworking—who was also responsible for the slew of custom cabinetry and built-ins throughout the house—the innovative shelf design literally began as a napkin sketch by Rasmussen.

Not every solution came so easily to Rasmussen and Su. A big challenge was figuring out how to best keep the existing footprint of the double rowhome while combining the two houses into one cohesive flowing design. “In some ways, it would have been easier to tear the buildings down and rebuild, but there were complications with the city that sent us in this direction,” recalls Rasmussen. “This was a gut renovation of the two structures and a recombining of them into one.”

A crew led by Dixon Shay of Shay Construction dismantled and rebuilt the home. Expanding on initial concepts from Heidi Shusterman Landscape Architect, Anna Prinzo of Digs Living worked up an overall landscape scheme for the garden, adding a custom garden shed for supplies off to one side, as well as a green roof planted with flowering perennials. Planter boxes; decking; and not one, but two outdoor dining and seating areas fill the space, which still has room for parking.

Back inside, art, books and oh-that-light are three constants in the Simons’ home, which is primarily painted white so the art provides the color. Comfort—epitomized by the heated Toto toilets and heated floors in the bathrooms—was a premium, as was practicality. Simons wanted an entryway that wouldn’t show a lot of dirt, and a gorgeous etched black porcelain tile provides the solution. Light wood floors enhance the home’s crisp and breezy vibe. Little touches—a folding pool table, vintage chairs upholstered by local maker Wild Chairy—add luster.

And everywhere, arresting views of that majestic magnolia draw the eye, a delight that just might be the crowning glory of this family’s new nest. ■



From top: Millwork and cabinetry by Pappajohn Woodworking; a huge magnolia anchors the garden.