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# The art of compromise

BY PAIGE PORTER PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDMUND BARR PRODUCED BY ANDREA CAUGHEY



The main section of Laurie and Bob Davis's house is only 18 feet wide. Its narrow shape is a result of the couple's desire to save three 50-year-old pecan trees on the property and create a spacious side yard.



Call her the material girl. Laurie Davis has enjoyed a long-standing love affair with building materials. She admits to having a

weakness for woods of all kinds, a passion she indulged when she and her husband, Bob, designed their new home in San Diego.

Partners in Davis and Davis Architects, Laurie and Bob have worked together long enough to know what they both like. Marrying their love of fine materials with a commitment to keep costs reasonable, the duo practiced the art of compromise in designing a house with an appearance that belies its price tag.

"There were some things we would not compromise on, and we stated those first," says Laurie. "And then there were some things on the wish list we knew we could lose. Those sacrifices helped us make our budget." The couple's strategy paid off: Their house cost them \$110 per square foot, a humble figure for architects who are accustomed to large client budgets.

Most of the rooms on the ground floor (left) are 15×18 feet, creating the home's rectangular spine. The exceptions are a few pocket rooms and nooks that jut into the side yard. Lucie comes in the front entrance (below), where windows and doors are coated in film for privacy.







Their regard for clean lines, ample natural light, and interplay of materials drove the design of their 3,000-square-foot home. The house—a collection of rectangles outfitted in black slate, gray stucco, and cedar bevel siding—is set alongside a spacious side yard where the couple's daughters, Maddie, 8, and Lucie, 5, play.

The eastern wall of the home is composed mostly of windows that overlook the deck and expanse of lawn. "The deck is the perfect example of how we employed a give-and-take rule with our wish list and our budget," says Laurie. "I really wanted ipe for the decking, as it's environmentally sustainable and it lasts forever. But it's expensive. In order to get the ipe, we had to make some sacrifices elsewhere, such as the windows." Originally Laurie wanted wood frames for the windows, but she chose aluminum instead because they were one-third the price.

Laurie opted for inexpensive birch cabinetry in the kitchen, pantry, and library, spending a mere \$3,000 for 25 linear feet. Custom trim makes it look more expensive and allows it to bear the weight of the slate countertops. The couple also spent more on a custom island with mahogany butcher block and maple cookbook cases built onto the end of the lower cabinets. "Still we saved enough to allow for splurges elsewhere," says Laurie, listing a professional-grade range and a special sliding door system.

The slider operates as a 22-foot-long unit that moves in a track, and it opens completely to allow for indoor/outdoor living between

Bob, a fan of Scandinavian design, appreciates the simplicity of Alvar Aalto's Pension chairs in the living room (right). Black webbing complements the dark slate around the fireplace. Next to the kitchen, a bump-out with a built-in banquette accommodates a breakfast table (above).

Differences in tone and grain become more apparent when you see various woods side by side. LAURIE DAVIS







In the kitchen, the couple mixed custom pieces, such as the island, with inexpensive IKEA cabinetry. Metal upper cabinets hang above a custom open shelf created by an artisan to display glass pieces. Just off the kitchen, the family room (above) is a comfortable place for Maddie and Lucie to play. Wooden doors slide closed to conceal the flat-screen television. The wine pantry (below) boasts a chalkboard door, where Laurie jots the names of wines she and Bob plan to try.





the kitchen and the deck. Laurie says the \$7,500 expense was worth it. "We live in a place where you can spend half your time outside, so why not invest in something that will improve your quality of life?"

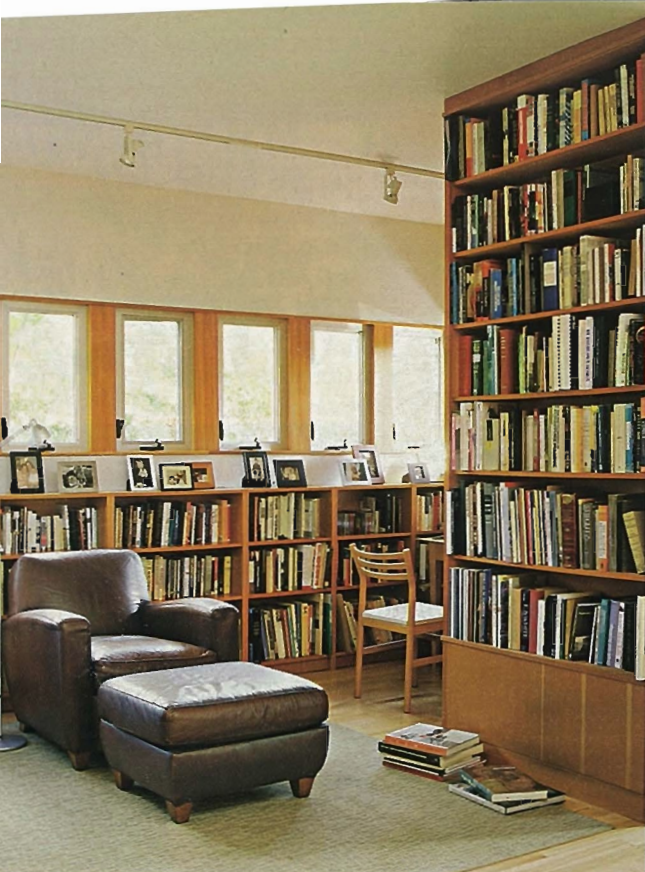
They saved in other areas. "We didn't have to have fir flooring, for example," says Bob. Instead, they chose second-grade maple for its imperfections—and its lower price tag. Laurie and Bob favor the maple characteristics and like how its beige tones complement the darker wood of the walls. "I believe that you see the beauty of wood when you put it against another kind," says Laurie. The staircase that leads to three bedrooms upstairs is a contrasting rich red jatoba wood.

Bob and Laurie made careful choices in window treatments as well. "We

"Having flow from indoors to outdoors is so important in Southern California," says Bob of the outdoor room just off the kitchen (*right*). "It's such a unique condition, to be outside at night in most seasons and not feel too chilly." The house occupies a narrow portion of the 75×140-foot lot, allowing an expanse of grass for the Davis daughters to play (*below*). "They spend a lot of time out there," says Laurie of the yard that belies the home's urban setting.







generally don't like window coverings because they take away the clean lines of the window-wall relationship," says Bob. However, Laurie notes, one obvious alternative—sandblasted or etched glass—is expensive and difficult to clean. So the couple had the bottom halves of the front windows coated with frosted film. Their added touch: a tiny square of clear glass—sans film—for a peephole on the front door.

"The paramount job of the architect is to find the art in function," says Bob. Laurie believes they succeeded. "Our goal with this house was to create beauty and durability in its design while being as diligent as we could with our pocketbook. And that is the true success story of this house." 🍷

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The library (*above left*) juts 10 feet into the yard, creating privacy from the street for adjacent outdoor living space. A large column holds books on two sides and a hidden entry closet on another. In the master bathroom (*above right*), the focal point is a bathtub that Laurie insisted on. "There are some things that you go into a project knowing you won't compromise on, and the bathtub was one of them." At the top of the stairs (*left*), sliding shoji doors separate a guest room from the hall.