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# PRETTY IN *Blue*

A fresh take on a Mission Hills manse meets a young family's desire for connected, comfortable living spaces.

STORY BY ANDREA DARR | PHOTOS BY MATT KOCOUREK

JILL TRAN AND CARMEN THOMAS HAVE NO trouble coming up with adjectives to describe their client's recently remodeled home: comfortable, informal, relaxed, pretty, finished, elegant, welcoming, family-friendly and unstuffy. But that doesn't mean it fits neatly into any pre-existing design category. "We spent a lot of time trying to figure out their style," Tran says. "It's definitely traditional but fresher."

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*Before (above):* Stained wood paneling and a brick fireplace made an upscale impression decades ago, but a darkened, secluded living room at the center of the home was not what the new owners wanted.

*After:* Paint and lighting do wonders for the room, making it feel larger than it did. Tran and Thomas removed the divided-light mullions on the exterior doors to increase light into the room and added crystal knobs to create continuity and add some sparkle.











*Before (right):* Old oak cabinets and heavy curtains didn't do the kitchen any favors in the looks department, while low ceilings cramped and darkened the room.

*After:* Busting out the fireplace wall and vaulting the ceiling gave the new owners the big bang they wanted for their buck. The good general layout wasn't messed with, but an enlarged island with seating was added for convenience. Painted custom cabinets and chef-quality appliances bring the kitchen into the 21st century.





And it has come a long way since the design team, including Tran + Thomas, architect Scott Bickford and builder Cory Childress, first walked through in early 2011. The home wasn't a complete nightmare — the previous owner was a doctor and general and had built the house solidly with commercial-style construction. "But it was stuck in the '70s," the homeowner recalls. "It was well-preserved and even had clean, working avocado appliances."

The space potential, along with its Mission Hills location, sold the young couple on the house. "I liked the ranch footprint and the attic space upstairs. The kitchen ceiling was at 8 feet, but we knew we could raise it because of how the attic was positioned," the homeowner explains.

The biggest problem was a double-wide fireplace bisecting the kitchen from the living room. With a growing family, they needed a more open plan that would allow everyone to be together. The solution was to install a new fireplace on the opposite side of the living room, connecting to the play room, and remove the wall entirely.

That structural change, paired with an updated color palette and materials, made a significant difference in the home's feel. The creams, blues and greens are calming and youthful, while touches of crystal add subtle glamour. Capitalizing on the general's sturdy foundation, Tran and Thomas selected durable, stain-resistant upholstery that will last through three kids.

"It's been well-used for a year now," the homeowner says. "We wanted our home to be lived-in."



*Before (above):* The original dining room shows a traditional style similar to the current homeowners' preference, although it's outdated.

*After:* Tran and Thomas had to knock out the sheetrock in order to remove all of the wallpaper, humorously calling it "petrified." A simplified scheme of neutral paint and a trio of ornate mirrors, paired with a modern version of a crystal chandelier, takes years off the aged space.