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Orange Coast



Expanding Horizons

As a Laguna Beach family grows, its rustic hilltop cottage gets a light-filled addition and a modern makeover

BY EMILY YOUNG

BELOW From the front door, a cantilevered staircase leads up to new bedrooms and bathrooms in the remodeled cabin.



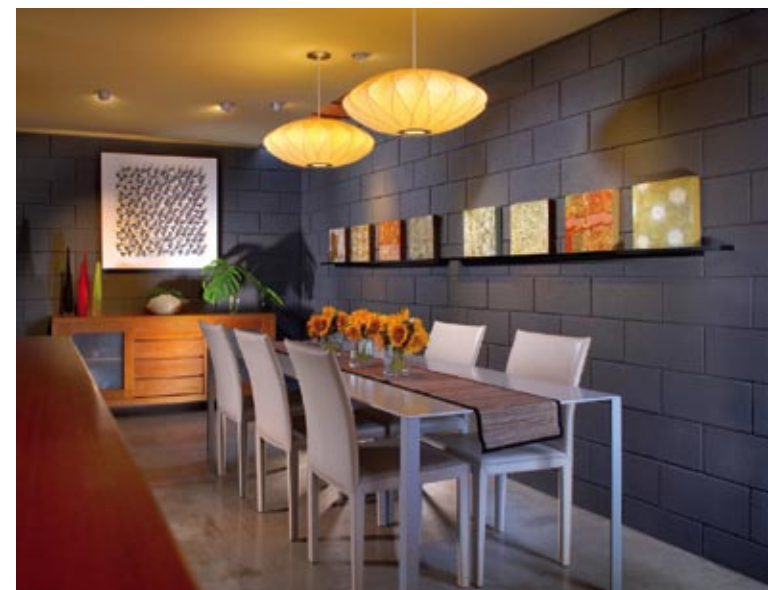
RIGHT The kitchen features a central work island, sleek mahogany cabinets by Bulthaup, limestone counters, and a concrete floor.



ABOVE Regrading the hillside created enough level ground for a small lawn and shaded patio beside the addition.

BELOW With its spectacular view and wood ceiling, the master bedroom feels like a treehouse.

BOTTOM George Nelson pendant lamps and contemporary artwork brighten the walls of the dining room.



As newlyweds in 1993, Horst and Arianna Noppenberger didn't mind squeezing into a 900-square-foot cabin. The rustic red wood structure faced the ocean and sat high on a Laguna Beach hillside anchored by eucalyptus trees. But, with the arrival

of the couple's son and impending birth of their daughter, what once felt cozy and romantic threatened to become cramped and claustrophobic.

For the Noppenbergers—an architect and an interior designer—the solution was not to move, but to expand and experiment. “By leaving the 1948 cottage intact and building a separate addition at the bottom of the lot with a bridge connecting the two, we were able to keep the old and incorporate it into the new,” says Horst, head of Horst Architects of Laguna Beach.

Treating the project as a laboratory of ideas, they designed a new 1,600-square-foot building where spaces for living, dining,

cooking, entertaining, and working connect in a fluid, family-friendly way. “Our philosophy was to keep things casual and warm, with as much open space as possible,” says Arianna, who runs Aria Design.

The light-filled addition required removing the eucalyptus trees, but their memory lives on inside the soaring structure built of apitong (a sustainable Malaysian hardwood), glass, concrete, and concrete block. Steel columns in the living room rise trunk-like to meet a canopy formed by glue-laminated ceiling beams and the folded corrugated-metal roof. “They remind us of what was here before,” Horst says.

A staircase in an enclosed bridge ties together the upper and lower parts of the complexly shaped, multilevel home. Midway between the two structures, a courtyard scooped out of the slope creates a sheltered patio and flat lawn, where their children, Paolo, 15, and Chiara, 11, can play. “Now we actually have a place to be outside, not just look out at the view,” Arianna says.

In 1999, after two years of construction, the Noppenbergers moved downhill, which paved the way for Phase 2 of the couple's grand plan: the 2006 reconfiguration of the cabin into three bedrooms and two baths. The couple sought out the latest in high-end European products, not surprising given Horst's German and Arianna's Italian roots. Their stylish choices include Bulthaup kitchen cabinets from Germany, and Bisazza tile, Gessi bathroom fixtures, and recycled mahogany flooring from Italy.

In the end, the experiment was an unqualified success. Not only did it give the Noppenbergers room to spread out, but it also taught them about producing better, smarter design. “We learned firsthand how difficult and costly it is to build on a hillside,” Arianna says. “The experience definitely affected our approach to our work, which is much simpler now.”

EMILY YOUNG is an Orange Coast contributing editor.