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A stately Victorian morphs into a warm, laid-back space with a family-hub kitchen at its center.

relaxing the rules

by PAIGE PORTER FISCHER photos REED DAVIS styling MICHAEL WALTERS



Carol and Jon Knorpp and sons Griffin and Jack, opposite, hang out on the front steps of their Larkspur, California, home. In the family room, orange and chocolate brown accents stand out against the light backdrop.

On any given day, Carol Knorpp has a full house. With two energetic sons, a lively labradoodle, and a pair of peppy kittens, the central hallway in her family's home sees more than a little foot traffic. You'd think that kind of commotion wouldn't belong in a historic Victorian.



But it happily abides here, because Carol and her husband, Jon, agreed on a common goal when it came to renovating their home: Keep it casual.

"Nothing makes you run from formality like a house full of boys and pets," says Carol, a remodeling designer. Jon agrees. "People generally think of Victorians as ostentatious and a bit frilly, and that's not who we are," he says. "We wanted something simple and functional and attractive."

The couple hired architect Ken Linsteadt to dissect the house and put it back together in a form more befitting a modern family, including sons Jack, 15, and Griffin, 12. First on the list was a new open kitchen that could act as a family hub. They sacrificed a large formal dining room in the back of the house to gain more space in the kitchen for a banquette, where the Knorpps now eat most of their meals. The old master bedroom became a family room, and Jon and Carol's bedroom moved upstairs into the former attic.

Bleached recycled white oak floors throughout the house lighten and unite the rooms. Linsteadt removed old doors and enlarged the doorways along the central hall, opening the spaces. The home's decorative casings are counterbalanced by more rustic touches elsewhere—such as 8-inch random-plank paneling on many of the walls and ceilings, and wooden windows with unpainted jambs. The look is a bit modern Belgian, a bit urban farmhouse.

Carol spent two years hand-picking every detail to complete that look—from light fixtures to tiles. "I always encourage my clients to push the envelope, and I had to take my own advice on this house," she says.



The former double parlor in the front of the house is now the living and dining rooms, this photo and opposite. Unconventional furnishings—a rustic concrete table, iron chandelier, and slipcovered benches and wicker chairs—keep the dining area casual.

In the living room, opposite, the home's original windows steal the show, but the Knorpps love a more practical element: "The light floors are still Jon's and my favorite part of the room—of the house, for that matter. They don't show a thing," says Carol.

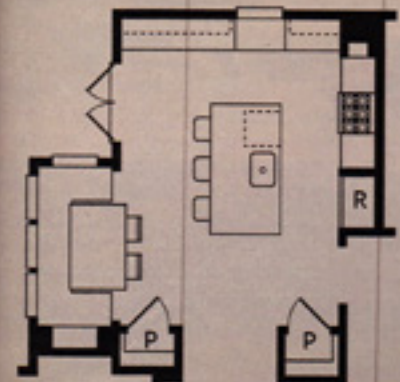
“There’s nothing I love more than being in the kitchen, watching the boys do their homework at the banquette, with the dog and cats running circles around the island. The kitchen is our real living room.”

CAROL KNORPP



Carol didn't want to spend a lot of money on an oversize hood for her stove. When she and architect Ken Uinsteadt saw a stack of reclaimed oak flooring left over from the kitchen floor, they asked the contractor if he could use it to face the metal hood insert. "It's probably one of my favorite accidental decisions," she says.

The banquette, opposite, is the epicenter of the Knorpps' house. "Nothing makes me happier than seeing people camped out here," says Carol. "Whoever comes into our house always ends up at the banquette. It's inevitable."



The open kitchen is centered by a large island that serves as cleanup zone and gathering spot.

try this at home

Carol has designed kitchens for years. But when making decisions for her own kitchen space, she was overwhelmed—like many of her clients—by all the options. Here are a few of her tips and tricks for getting it right.

Remember that nothing should be too sacred in your kitchen. “If you decide to put in stainless or marble, you have to let go. It’s going to get nicked, scratched, and stained. But once you get past the first imperfection, you can start looking forward to the real patina, which is beautiful,” she says.

Create nooks and crannies for storage. Built-ins alongside the banquette create storage for breakfast dishes, above right. An electrical outlet allows for a small television to be tucked away instead of occupying valuable counter space. Next to the stove is a storage cubby for a blender, page 61, one of the most awkward appliances to store and retrieve.

Mix industrial elements with traditional design. The lights above the island, below left, are quite contemporary, and special filament bulbs boost the industrial look provided by the unusually large aluminum sink and modern faucet, below far right.

If your kitchen is all white, try making a few of your cabinets glass-front, opposite. That way, you can add personality and color on the shelf spaces. “I went so far as to choose a glass-front refrigerator,” says Carol. “I love it. It’s always a mess. We aren’t styling our refrigerator with Perrier bottles. But it adds so much character to the kitchen, I think.”

Opt for drawers instead of cabinetry below the counters. It’s easier to keep your pots, pans, and dishes organized and within reach.





“Those boards were murder to place and paint, but they were worth it. That’s the bedroom’s unexpected element, that extra detail that really makes the space.”

New windows facing south, right, take in the view that convinced Jon and Carol to splurge on converting the attic into a master suite. “We anguished over that decision,” says Jon. “You couldn’t have imagined anything up here but mice. But one day we climbed a ladder and sat where our bedroom would be, and watching the sunset that night, we decided to go for it.” Horizontal square-edge paneling, above, gives the new space a pleasing sense of age. 🏠

For buying information see pag 242.

