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SUMMER 2010
Homes have personalities.
Some homes are austere and forbidding; others are rambling and overstuffed. But every once in a while you walk into a home and feel like you’re home. It is that welcoming, that warm, that inviting. It’s just, well, easy to be there.

That’s how a visitor feels walking into the Mission Hills home of Terry and Lynn O’Leary. Despite the fact that a remodel blew the home up from 2,300 square feet to nearly 9,000, it still feels intimate and comfortable. You might even call it the Big Easy.

“I like to think of my front door as an entrance to a place where others can come and feel at home, too,” Lynn says. “We like old homes for their charm and character. This house had been on the market for just one day when we walked in. I immediately felt like I was home. We bought it within 48 hours and then I panicked. I thought of all the time and love the previous owner had put into this house, and I felt heartstuck.”

Terry drew up the remodel plans so the narrow, three-bedroom house would be able to accommodate the couple’s five kids, three dogs and a cat. About six months into construction, Lynn was able to come and see her new home, because enough work had been done that she could visualize everything. Now the family has lived there for three years.

“I love this location, with the mature
The easy flow of the O’Leary home is evident upon entering; these photos show the entry hall and stairs leading to the study, bar, kitchen, dining area and great room. Other rooms connect or are right around the corners.

This beautiful two-area powder room (at right) is in keeping with the detailed look of the rest of the home.

trees, winding streets, fountains and gardens all around us,” she says. “The architecture in this area is beautiful. But what it comes down to is simple. This is the place we live. We call it home, and we all feel at home here. That’s the most important thing.”

With kids from age 13 to 23 running around, the dogs and the cat, out-of-town family dropping in for a weekend, and friends popping by for a glass of wine, this is a house that gets a workout. And everything, from the floor plan to the imaginative mix of antiques and new treasures, meshes together to make this home not only stunningly beautiful, but workable.

“Lynn didn’t want to have any spaces you couldn’t touch,” says designer Lisa Curran, owner of Lisa Curran Interiors. “I’ve worked with her before so I had a sense of her style. This house is totally detail-driven.”

“This house has such style and sensibility,” says Geri Higgins, owner and president of Portfolio Kitchen & Home, whose director

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A rarely used living room was repurposed as a large dining room, now used frequently for large gatherings.
of design David Zebley worked on the house. “When you walk in, everything is beautifully appointed and stunning, but at the same time it’s balanced and warm. It has a fabulous, seamless feeling.”

The honey feeling comes from clean design, lots of pastel color and attention to detail. For example, Curran transformed a simple powder room into what she calls a “jewel box.”

“I drew up the design for the table that holds the sink, and I had my workroom design the fabric that would cover it,” Curran says. “It looks like a beautiful gown, very detailed and finished. I like to take something ordinary and transform it into something that is extraordinary. You peek in there and say, ‘Oh my gosh, what a beautiful space, all trimmed out and tasseled.’”

There was a real effort to put beautiful things into the O’Leary home, from the linen Scalamandre window treatments adorned with pheasants and flowers in the office, to the Michaelangelo marble in the butler’s pantry, to the traditional Smallbone style maple kitchen cabinetry painted cream with a rich, brown glaze finish.

“Lisa really helped me focus,” Lynn says. “I wanted a house we could live in, but I also wanted a place to hold fundraisers, school events, graduation parties and rehearsal dinners. So the house was built for us, but it is also versatile enough to host big groups. We can put a bar outside and lay out food in the kitchen and we’re ready to entertain.”

Terry’s construction industry background allowed him to have the vision – where the windows would be placed, how far apart the beams would be, the step elevation and how the water would flow through drains outside.

“Lynn told me what rooms she wanted, like a mud room and a sun porch, and we blocked everything out in one

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The butler’s pantry/bar is strategically placed between the main entertaining rooms and the kitchen. Standout cabinet design by Portfolio Kitchen and Home mixes with Michaelangelo marble for a unique while traditional effect.
No corners were cut to match the original in this home project (at left); the O’Learys wanted to make sure it didn’t scream ‘remodel.’ This is evident in the great room design. Lisa Curran has combined comfy pieces with not often seen antiques for a lived in but special look.

O’Leary pets (at right) are an important part of the family mix and all have cream and white coloring, an unintended but charming addition to the home’s color story.

Lynn O’Leary (below) hosting a gathering; the flow between kitchen and other spaces is priceless for such occasions.
A stunning Portfolio kitchen that functions for a large, busy family. Cream cabinetry, walls, white marble countertops and white fireplace achieve Lynn’s desire for light and bright; wood, rugs and fabric choices make it homey.
An unusually beautiful mudroom was created with mellow woods, stone flooring, cheerful fabric and David Zebley’s clock armoire creation.

This cheery sunroom beckons with its mix of upbeat fabrics, light and views to the outside.
This outdoor room offers seating for a crowd, which is just what the O’Learys love.

The back yard was transformed with the addition of a carriage house, an outdoor room and several seating areas.
night,” he says. “This house was built in 1935, and had a big dining room and living room, but a tiny kitchen. That was how people lived then. So the challenge was for us to maintain the architectural integrity of this home while making it large enough and workable enough for our family.”

The kitchen is a good example. In a new build, the kitchen is totally open, usually to a great room and eating space, with high ceilings. So while the O’Leary kitchen is large, the lower ceilings make the space appear cozy, and the flow of traffic around the room easily moves into the adjoining sun room and family room.

“I love light, bright and sunny,” Lynn says. “And I fought for the white marble counters. I’ve always wanted them because they remind me of the cathedrals in Italy. And the veins of green and taupe are so beautiful.”

The large wood island is a good contrast to the cold marble and warms up the kitchen. Since Lynn loves to cook, she opted for having all the appliances within arm’s reach, with the rest of the kitchen meant for eating or relaxing. A fireplace at one end with two comfy chairs is where the girls often end up doing their homework.

The backyard was transformed from a simple garden space with the addition of a carriage house, four seating areas including one with a fireplace, a jacuzzi and two fountains. Conversation areas were created so parties would flow effortlessly. Sand dollars and seashells can be seen in the limestone quarried in Topeka, and the chimneys boast the home’s original brick. Wooden beams were handcrafted.

“We took the time and trouble to make sure this didn’t look like a remodel,” Terry says. “No one realizes this isn’t the original home. We didn’t cut any corners, we matched all the joints, we found weathered limestone for the patios.
We tore out every window in the house so all the wood would match. We wanted to do this right.”

As a result, this house exudes craftsmanship. The hand-painted walls of Terry’s office look paneled and were created by David Nesbitt, who is responsible for the mosaic design in the Nelson-Atkins Museum’s Kirkwood Hall. An antique clock face, a favorite of Lynn’s, was enhanced when Zeblye created a body around it to resemble an intricately designed antique armoire. Built-in bookcases that are new mirror antique pieces in the family room.

“Elements of French and English were brought together in this home,” Higgins says. “It is truly an art to make a home feel like you’ve lived in it forever without that old dusty feel. This has all the grand elements but is still homey and happy.”

“Details bring a home to the next level,” Curran says. “They don’t have to cost a lot. You just need to take a little more time to make it right. The elements of beauty, which are color, form, shape and lines, are all in this home.”

The O’Learys roll out the welcome mat for visiting family in a way they never could before. The carriage house makes a perfect guest area for Lynn’s parents, who had never spent the night with their daughter in her first 25 years of marriage.

“Now they can stay with us and they have their own little hideaway, with a private entrance,” Lynn says. “The carriage house works for so many people on so many levels. My oldest son lives there now while he decides whether to get an apartment or a house. It’s a treat, really, to have him here again. It gives us all a chance to re-connect. I love having my family together.”

The family also cooks together, with one daughter whipping up a French apple tart, and a son who specializes in strawberry salad dressing. On a recent evening, friends dropped by with their daughter. Terry opened the wine while

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Lynn fixed rotini pasta with butter and Parmesan cheese for the young girl.

“That kind of thing happens a lot here,” Lynn says. “The more the merrier! We love to share our home with friends. One of my dreams is to keep all the spaces in this home filled, because by the time our last daughter leaves for college, we’ll probably have some grandchildren to entertain. The cycle of life will continue on.”

She makes it look so effortless, so easy.

A broadcast and print journalist for more than 25 years, Kathleen Leighton’s articles have appeared in The New York Times, Better Homes & Gardens, Newsweek and many regional and local magazines and newspapers. She writes most often about design, lifestyle, food, travel, profiles of interesting people and business.