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The Kulick home in San Luis Obispo: Total makeover

Builder Ben Kulick spent four years intensely remodeling his San Luis Obispo home

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An open great room makes the home feel larger than its 2,000 square feet.

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By Rebecca Juretic | rajuretic@sbcglobal.net

In 2003, Ben Kulick was preparing to move from Las Vegas to San Luis Obispo, the town where he was born and raised. As he shopped for potential homes, one stood out from the rest: a 1970s bungalow that he lived in when he was a student at San Luis Obispo High School.

"It just felt like home to me," he said.

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As owner of a construction company in Las Vegas, he was up to the challenge of an extensive remodel.

"It was straight out of the '70s and had never been touched," he said. At the time, the house sported orange shag carpet, worn linoleum, and fake wood paneling.

Kulick worked with two firms to plan a

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TIPS FROM BEN KULICK

BAN THE JUNK DRAWER

Inserts configured to hold specific items in drawers and cabinets are helpful organizational tools. They keep things from becoming jumbled and also discourage stray items from finding their way in.

GO NATURAL

There is intrinsic beauty in raw, natural materials such as unstained wood and untamed grasses.

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Real hardwood floors offer an experience that you cannot get with any other material. The look, sound and feel of them add warmth and character to your home.

contemporary renovation for the 2,000-square-foot house. San Luis Obispo designer Isaac Greenetz was involved with the entire project. Los Angeles firm Marmol Radziner, renowned for its contemporary designs, worked on the latter half of the project. Their goal, according to Kulick, was to “push the envelope on detail and design.”

Kulick worked hands-on in nearly every phase of construction, including framing, dry walling, finish carpentry and landscaping. He and his subcontractors worked long hours, setting up canopies to work during rainstorms and renting light towers to labor late into the night.

To Kulick, the great challenge of modern design is restraint — keeping adornments to a minimum to allow the architecture to

speak for itself. Such simplicity is deceptively complex, requiring great precision. For instance, there are no moldings to cover up gaps between the floor and the wall. In order to maintain a miniscule two-millimeter gap between concrete countertops and cabinetry in the kitchen, the crew took an entire month to build the concrete forms.

The hard angles and lines of the house are softened by organic materials, kept in as natural a state as possible. Wood and concrete were left unstained to keep the focus on their intrinsic beauty. Again, Kulick employed his intense eye for detail. Simple cabinet doors made of birds-eye maple were painstakingly constructed to match up the wood grain. Metal handles and hardware were individually designed and hand fabricated. Every board of the black walnut flooring was carefully arranged to best highlight its color and grain. Doors were custom built from two-inch thick solid planks of maple.

“When you look at everything, all these details almost disappear,” he explained. “But it creates a finished picture that is pleasing to the eye, although you’re almost not sure why.”

Kulick kept furnishings, art and adornments to an absolute minimum. To maintain his streamlined look, he took an inventory of all of his belongings and fabricated drawers and cabinets to store specific items, including every small appliance and utensil in his kitchen.

“Everything is accessible, so when I try to find anything, it’s right there,” he said.

Also concealed is the home’s sophisticated automation system that controls lighting, locks, music and even window coverings. Speakers are invisible, concealed with mylar sheets that were lightly mudded. Every electrical outlet and switch was strategically placed and all wiring is hidden from sight.

Naturalistic landscaping further blunts the hard edges of the home and hardscape. Undulating clumps of prairie sedge spill over garden walls and pathways, providing a drought tolerant and low maintenance ground cover. Kulick had mature coastal live oaks lifted onto the property by crane.

“There are no curves in the house, so the wild landscaping softens everything,” he said. “I think the contrast is appealing.”

Kulick was just as detailed with landscaping as he was with architecture. It took nine months just to build retaining and garden walls and to lay concrete. Every board that makes up his 27,000 lineal feet of pipe fencing was individually milled onsite.

The renovation took four years of continuous work to complete. The project allowed Kulick to become acquainted with local subcontractors, helping him to launch his new construction business, Stalwork Inc. “The house was an adventure,” he said. “Change for me is always exciting. Friends who saw the house in both iterations have a unique appreciation of the change.”

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bobbyinslo

@ warren hamDick; the design is amazing, have you seen the rest of the picturers? If so you would see just how the entire house flows naturally, it is truly is a work of art, even the outside coming in doesn't seem to have a rough breaking point. What do I know, I'm sure that warren is a master designer who gets paid millions to design dream homes that are on the cutting edge of architectural design, or maybe he just likes to put others down from the safety of his computer.

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warren hamrick

Sorry, but I see nothing great about this design. I too am a minimalist and as a designer, I appreciate good detail. It seems this owner spent more time on the little details than he did on the house design.

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