A Change of Heart

KIDS RAISED, PETS GONE, A SINGLE BUSINESSWOMAN UPDATES HER HOUSE TO FIT HER NEW ROLES IN LIFE

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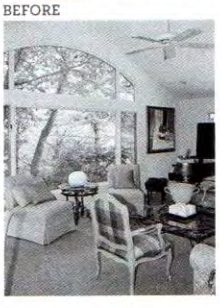

Susan Brunn's home makeover inspirations came right out of her closet: sexy high-heel shoes (including pewter-colored Pradas and alligator-skin Manolo Blahnik pumps), a cashmere-silk scarf in soft sage, and a pair of graphite-gray Jackie O sunglasses. Susan was brainstorming with designers about ideas for converting her humble 1955 suburban Minneapolis ranch into a chic New York Hamptons-style shingle home when she opened her closet doors.

"It was a fun way for Susan to relay what she was looking for in her home," says Rosemary Merrill, a designer at Casa Verde, a Minneapolis custom kitchen and bath design business. "When she brought those things in, we instantly knew she wanted taupe, gray, and caramel tones, with soft whites and a touch of bling."

Colors and decorating style were just part of the equation. Lifestyle changes primarily drove Susan's renovation. "When I first moved in here I was married, had two kids, two cats, and two dogs," Susan says. "Here I am 15 years later. I'm divorced, my children are grown and out of the house, and all my animals have died, so it's down to me," she adds with a good-natured chuckle. "I love my house and the setting, but it was designed as more of a family house. I entertain a lot and have quite a few houseguests, so I had to figure out what changes could make it work for me now."

Instead of raising a family, Susan's life now revolves around her work as a business partner at Casa Verde and entertaining friends and clients. "I was only living in half of the house," she says, explaining that she rarely ventured to her lower-level former "rec room."

Susan and designer Merrill enlisted Minneapolis architect Jeff Murphy to do some of the heavy lifting, particularly working on structural and exterior design issues. Together the team spent the better part of a year reconfiguring both levels of the house, adding an exercise room above the existing garage, and giving the exterior an updated look with new cedar-shingle cladding.

Murphy lifted the existing roof to boost ceilings from 8 feet to 9 feet 4 inches on the main level. Large double-hung windows with

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Dining room The family room was converted into a spacious dining room—sun-washed during the day and warmed by a fireplace at night. Side chairs from Hickory Chair are covered in two fabric designs and partner with a Guy Chaddock table Susan had refinished. A chandelier from Ochre introduces a measure of glamour. **Wine and music room** A wall of walnut cubbies and two Sub-Zero wine chillers keep wine close by the dining room and kitchen. Susan Brunn's Steinway grand piano is showcased, illuminated by a glittering Pottery Barn chandelier. **Homeowner** Susan Brunn **Porch** The ceiling was vaulted and painted Sherwin-Williams' "Accessible Beige" with a shimmer finish. Susan's ottoman and sofa pillows were re-covered in an animal-print fabric from Lee Jofa. The sectional was updated with fabric from Kravet. **Preceding pages** A fireplace flanked by windows replaced an outdated picture window in the living room. Sofas are from Hickory Chair, and a wood-and-iron coffee table is from Formations through Holly Hunt. The Tamarian carpet is through Woven Arts.

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Kitchen Appliances integrated into the custom cabinets by Casa Verde give the kitchen a furniture feel that blends with the adjoining living room. Wavy handmade glass imported from Germany and installed in cabinet fronts reflects light and adds character to the space. The island chandelier and the hanging lantern between the wall cabinets are from Dennis & Leen.
Casual dining area Drexel Heritage chairs and a curved settee covered in a Duralee fabric circle a Hickory White table. Ebony-stained floors replaced light maple.
Front exterior With shingle siding and varied roof lines, the former ranch house relfects a Hamptons aesthetic.

transoms were installed throughout the house, filling rooms with light and transforming the boring ranch into a Hamptons look-alike.

A wall dividing the living room from the kitchen was removed, creating an entertaining area that reclaims the formerly neglected living room. Three sets of French doors were added along the living room's side wall, opening the space to a new balcony that overlooks the swimming pool. "Now the house opens up to the outdoors and takes advantage of this beautiful wooded site," Merrill says.

"The house sits up high on a hill above the pool," Susan adds. "When you're looking over the pool, it's like being in a tree house or in a snow globe in the winter."

A new Chilton stone fireplace (the same limestone is used on the exterior), flanked by floor-to-ceiling windows, anchors one end of the living room, replacing a dated picture window. Beamed and coffered ceilings and detailed trimwork on mantels and doorways give the house the weight and scale it previously lacked and add to the classic East Coast feel.

Master bath Calacatta Gold marble and Walker Zanger mosaic tiles line the walk-in steam shower outfitted with a rainhead from Jaclo and hand shower from Rohl. Wood panels and marble create a sumptuous surround for the Kohler whirlpool tub with a polished-nickel Rohl tub filler. Double sconces from Urban Electric light up the vanity designed by Casa Verde. **Master bedroom** The king-size Henredon bed is upholstered in a Beacon Hill fabric and draped with an Eileen Fisher crushed silk coverlet from Garnet Hill. **Side exterior** Massive brackets support the new balcony. All-new doors, siding, and Pella windows update the house's exterior.

In the living room, Susan replaced two leather sofas with shapely linen-covered pieces. "After 15 years of kids and dogs, they were done," she sighs. Pattern enters the picture via the Tibetan area rug, pillows, and the stacked limestone fireplace surround.

Merrill gave Susan the kitchen she wanted—inspired by the movie *Something's Gotta Give*. Cream-colored, inch-thick recessed paneled doors create shadows and have the scale the large space demands. A handsome center island features a walnut dining ledge that accommodates four at leather-seated stools.

"Susan did not want backs on the bar stools because she wanted to be able to see the fireplace and the windows in the living room," Merrill explains. Plus they tuck under neatly when she uses the island for serving. A small round dining table and curved settee and chairs offer more cozy kitchen-side seating for those who prefer relaxing around a table rather than sitting at the counter.

The crowning touch for Susan is the richly grained gold-and-gray Calacatta marble countertop. "I saw the stone and almost

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hugged it," Susan says. At the counter under one window, Merrill couldn't resist playing up the beauty of the stone, designing a marble apron accented by a satin-nickel towel bar.

The former family room was converted into the dining room with French doors to the balcony. Built-in cabinets that complement those in the kitchen, plus an updated two-sided gas fireplace (between the dining room and porch) give the house architectural interest and charm. For Susan's dose of bling, she chose a glittering "drizzle" chandelier. She had her existing dining table refinished and updated it with new upholstered dining chairs.

The old dining room was converted into a wine and music room that is visible from the foyer, giving Susan's Steinway grand piano the stage it deserves. "It's the perfect spot for the piano. It's not in the way and yet is accessible when I entertain," she says. Walnut cubbies and two tall wine coolers beautifully display wine.

Architect Murphy opened up Susan's rarely used lower level to create an inviting social space that houses a family room with a wood-burning fireplace, Susan's home office, guest bedrooms and baths, a back entry with mudroom, and a second kitchen handy to the swimming pool.

Massive curved brackets on the exterior support the balcony that overlooks the pool and boost the lower-level's architectural importance. Murphy worked with the builder to include many eco-friendly features in the remodel, too, including a geothermal heating and cooling system. "It not only heats and cools my house, it heats the pool," Susan says.

While the project was extensive, the 4,000-square-foot house's footprint wasn't altered. Rooms flow together, and Susan can entertain with ease. She spends much of her day working in her sunny lower-level office. "I feel like the house has grown into the lot," Susan says. "It is now what it was always meant to be."

Architect: Jeff Murphy **Kitchen/bath and interior designer:** Rosemary Merrill
Interior designer: Leila Lake **Landscape architect:** Adam Newton
For more information, see sources on page 104

FLOOR PLANS: CARSON ODE