

ON LOCATION

A Sausalito House Transformed

When an architect set out to remodel her home in the Bay Area, she envisioned a small project. It took her former intern to persuade her to dream bigger.



Matthew Millman for The New York Times



By Tim McKeough

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Many architects dream of designing their own homes — but not all architects. Carrie Byles, for instance, is a partner at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, one of the largest architecture firms in the United States, but when it came to renovating her 1956 house in Sausalito, Calif., she wanted help.

“I thought that if I designed it on my own, it would probably take me 10 years because I’d fuss over it a long time, and I’m so busy I’d never have time to work on it,” said Ms. Byles, 56, who spends her days focused on much larger projects like university and condominium towers, as well as an expansion of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and the management of her firm.

She had bought the two-bedroom, 1,671-square-foot, midcentury-modern house in 2011 for about \$1 million because she liked its post-and-beam construction, exposed ceilings and seven-foot-square sliding glass doors. But other elements looked tired, like the dated kitchen and the vinyl-clad solarium added by a previous owner.



The house was expanded and the main living spaces were reoriented to take advantage of surrounding views. Matthew Millman for The New York Times

In 2014, shortly after Sausalito introduced new regulations to address a housing shortage, allowing an increase in floor area for homeowners building accessory dwelling units (or secondary residences, like in-law suites), Ms. Byles decided it was time to make a few changes. Her plan was to add a wheelchair-accessible in-law unit on the lower level and renovate her kitchen.

“I’m really passionate about homes that support all phases of life,” said Ms. Byles, who envisioned her parents using the in-law unit when they visited from Washington State, and using it herself (or housing a caretaker there) later in life.



Carrie Byles is an accomplished architect, but when it came to renovating her own house, she said, “I thought that if I designed it on my own, it would probably take me 10 years.” Matthew Millman for The New York Times

For design help, she called on [Jennifer Weiss](#), a San Francisco architect who began her career as an intern in Ms. Byles’s office. “She was my boss 25 years ago,” said Ms. Weiss, who now has her own firm and has designed numerous private homes. “Of course, I was thrilled.”

But where Ms. Byles envisioned a few changes, Ms. Weiss saw the potential to do something transformational. She quietly developed two sets of plans: one that reflected the limited changes Ms. Byles had requested and another that illustrated what could be done by completely renovating and expanding the house, including demolishing the solarium, reorienting the main living spaces to take advantage of views to Mount Tamalpais and Richardson Bay, increasing the size of the living room and replacing the shingled exterior with an expanse of glass and wood slats.

“Jennifer did that thing that architects do” when they want to convince their clients to dream bigger, Ms. Byles said. “She put this drawing in front of me, and I don’t think I spoke for a couple of minutes. I just thought, ‘Oh my God, that’s so much money.’ But it was the architect in me that said, ‘Oh my God, we have to do this.’”

As Ms. Byles’s notion of funding a small renovation with her savings faded away, she took out a construction loan and found a houseboat to rent as a temporary home. She and Ms. Weiss also took pains to keep the neighbors happy, outlining the shape of the proposed additions with poles and tape during the planning phase, then adjusting the pitch of the roof to preserve the view from a nearby house.

Construction began in the summer of 2015, and the house — now 2,436 square feet — was completed by Farallon Construction by the end of 2016, at a cost of about \$435 a square foot. Ms. Weiss’s design resulted in a kitchen far larger, airier and with more dramatic views than Ms. Byles had initially imagined, along with an open layout that promotes indoor-outdoor living. Hopper windows and seven operable skylights allow the house to be cooled entirely by air currents, eliminating the need for air-conditioning. (The skylights are also handy for clearing smoke when “you burn your pork chops in the broiler,” Ms. Byles noted.)



In one corner of the living room is an OW150 daybed by Ole Wanscher for Carl Hansen & Son (from \$4,355) and a Mare Romance sofa by René Holten for Artifort (\$4,949). Matthew Millman for The New York Times

Landscaping and finishing touches took another year, and included planting 50 Japanese maple trees. Ms. Byles’s father used to sell the trees, and she had maintained a collection of 18 of them in pots for years. To complete the landscape, she asked her father to bring her one more — but he arrived with 32.

Although Ms. Weiss designed the house, Ms. Byles believes the experience has made her a better architect. “Every architect should be a client once,” she said. “I have visceral empathy for my clients now. When you’re writing checks out of your personal account, it’s a big deal.”

And the accessory dwelling unit has proved surprisingly flexible in accommodating unforeseen lifestyle changes. During the construction, Ms. Byles met her boyfriend, Greg Ryan, 63, who moved in after the house was completed and found his own use for the space.

“He turned it into a man cave,” Ms. Byles said. “I had never thought of that option.”

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Correction: Oct. 23, 2018

An earlier version of this article misstated the surname of Carrie Byles’s boyfriend. He is Greg Ryan, not Bryan.