

ranch style

Blown away by its breath-taking location in the hills of Los Angeles, a couple looked past a dated 1940s single-story ranch's exterior and imagined their dream home. Nearly 10 years and two kids later, they turned small rooms and a cramped configuration into an airy open-plan space with an easy indoor-outdoor flow, a backyard begging for lounging and Nerf-gun wars, and stunning vistas for days.

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"We wanted the backyard to be casual yet elegant for entertaining," says co-owner John Dolan. They replaced a tiny patio with an expansive one, and planted a surrounding garden filled with succulents and California natives.



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We gravitate toward modernism that is warm and inviting, rather than austere. We also wanted the house to feel timeless, to transcend trends,” says Dolan.

Douglas-fir cabinetry and oak floors warm up the sleek kitchen. The 4-by-12-foot soapstone-topped island provides an excellent surface for pastry dough and houses Sarah Lambert’s “dream” cooktop; a Gaggenau induction stove, which she prizes for its thermal precision. A clever pop-out cupboard holds Lambert’s mixer. The light fixture is from Roll & Hill.



When Sarah Lambert and John Dolan

bought their home in Los Angeles in 2005, it was the unique setting that seduced them. Located on a ridgeline high in the hills of Studio City, California, the property has knockout views in two directions, stretching as far as the San Gabriel and Santa Monica Mountains. The 1947 ranch structure, however, was less inspiring. "It felt dated," recalls Lambert, a pastry chef who once owned a bakery in Mill Valley and now gives private cooking lessons. Its façade featured faded stucco and wood paneling, and there was a curlicued wrought-iron railing on the front porch. The interior, she says, had a "closed-in feeling," with a chopped-up floor plan and limited access to the outdoors. Still, Lambert and her husband, a commercial director, saw potential.

Nearly a decade passed before the couple started the rebuild (time flew while they focused on work and raising their two sons, Magnus and Jasper, now 9 and 8), but they collected ideas along the way. Wish number one: a kitchen that would function as the heart of a main living area. The original was tiny, with a single oven and a cooktop hood installed at the height of Lambert's chin (she's five-foot-ten); she also had to keep her baking gear in the oven and her blender in the garage. Maximizing the backyard was priority number two. "We didn't cook or eat outside often, because the grill was down by the pool, and every little thing required another trip," Dolan says. In 2013, with architect Barbara Bestor and landscape designer Judy Kameon, the couple pulled the trigger on the renovation. "We opened everything up," says Bestor, who introduced oversize windows and glass doors in front and back. Inside, she had a central fireplace removed and reconfigured the living-dining-kitchen area as one space; also, the pitch of the roof was raised by more than a foot. Kameon added two large patios and a lush garden.

Though its footprint increased only slightly, the four-bedroom home feels much more spacious now—especially when the glass doors in the back are open and the family can eat, play, and entertain in the open air. "This house is a joy to live in every day," says Dolan. Cool ranch, accomplished.



the living is easy

1 | Magnus, left, Lambert, Jasper, and Dolan often gather around the fire pit after dinner for s'mores. The furniture both inside and outside—like the pieces shown here and the coffee table below, all by Plain Air—is low and modern, in keeping with the home's midcentury aesthetic. 2 | The oversize daybed, custom-designed by Kameon, is wide enough for the entire family to pile on.





clean
lines,
cool
palette

1 | In the master bedroom, a framed photograph shot by Dolan hangs over a 1950s dresser designed by Richard Thompson and a lamp inherited from Lambert's grandmother. 2 | The couple's bedding is by Coyuchi. 3 | Brass fixtures, subway tiles, and a blue-and-white cement Moroccan-tile floor add color and personality to the master bath.





“
We wanted a house that was modest in scale but customized to our needs, and we got it. The light and flow make it feel much bigger than it is,” says Lambert.

Capiz-shell globe lights from Restoration Hardware warm up the back patio, where a Plain Air dining table and benches are steps from the kitchen. Shelves built into the island display Lambert's cookbooks.