

Integrated architecture La Jolla home embodies three designs in one



LEFT: Architect Heather Johnston used the principles “cool, clean and green” when designing a new kitchen, patio, pantry, bar, laundry room and master suite for her La Jolla home, originally built in the 1950’s.

BELOW: Architect Heather Johnston chose repurposed materials such as non-porous slate from Vermont for her kitchen countertops and sustainable custom wood flooring by Oregon Lumber Company to compliment her modern kitchen design.



By Christina Chomut
SPECIAL TO THE UNION-TRIBUNE

What started as a cottage in the 1950’s has since transformed into a current-day architectural anomaly. In 2000, Su Mei Yu, San Diego-based chef and author, commissioned Public Architecture and Planning to build a second floor studio for her partner, artist Italo Scanga. Public used concrete masonry units (CMU) with a burnished finish and rebar as reinforcement to create a structure which “encompasses the original without obliterating it,” according to Public.

“Mei Yu said to us, ‘I don’t know how you are going to do it, but I want you to build a studio and still keep my house intact,’” said Jim Gates, prin-

cipal, Public Architecture and Planning. “So simply stated, we built a house around a house.”

Inside the new walls, the old house remains with windows and doors removed, but bright green siding intact. Exposed structural materials and commercial storefront windows added industrial strength and durability to the space.

In 2004, architect Heather Johnston and her husband David Dickins visited the space for the first time and made an offer on the home the same day.

“We were looking for something we would be happy to come home to,” said Johnston. “We wanted something west of the freeway, but more so, something we could live and work in.”

Knowing they would use Public’s second floor addition as their office, Johnston and Dickins decided to add dividers between their working space and living space to benefit both clients and themselves.

Johnston chose Panelite, a translucent resource-efficient material, with a honeycomb of aluminum in the panels, to function as space dividers. “Panelite can act as dividers for privacy, but still allows an element of light in,” said Johnston.

Johnston and Dickins were in love with Public’s addition and appreciated the preserved elements of the original 1950’s cottage. Despite their affinity for the space as it was; the couple quickly realized the need to rebuild their outdated kitchen and master bathroom.

With a desire to create a modern, yet sustainable kitchen and bathroom, Johnston used a combination of new and repurposed materials.

The local architect chose a non-porous domestic slate for her kitchen countertops and sustainable custom wood flooring by Oregon Lumber Company to compliment her modern kitchen design. The three-quarter-inch thick wood block flooring was repurposed, previously off-cuts from the factory’s wood window division.

“I thought, how interesting to bring two old-fashioned materials and make them a little sexy by putting them in an environment that is all white, crisp and modern with steel and glass,” said Johnston.

“This was my serial collaboration to work with what was already here,” said Johnston. “The new addition doesn’t exactly match the old, which is on purpose. We wanted to be able to tell what Public Architecture and Planning did and what I did.”

Johnston’s kitchen addition won San Diego Home & Garden “Best Green Project” Home of the Year in 2009.

Johnston looks for ways to live life with fewer physical barriers. The architect places emphasis on light, air and surroundings in her work and allows the simplicity of such goals to speak clearly through her design.



By integrating skylights, windows and multiple transoms into her kitchen design, architect Heather Johnston was able to bring natural light and airflow into her northeast-facing kitchen.

Photos by Brady Architectural Photography

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