

MAKEOVERS WE LOVE

ART AND SOUL

A local couple envisions inside-and-out makeovers that turn funky old homes into artful modern spaces. BY RHEA MAZE



WHEN RUCKER HILL BOUGHT his first home over a decade ago, the first thing he did was walk in and throw a hammer through the wall. Then, he got to work building his vision from the ground up.

Where the average person might see a hopelessly dull and dated run-down house, Hill sees a blank canvas—and that's where the magic begins.

“Before I start a project, I walk into the home and can literally see how everything should be in my mind,” Hill says. “I see walls melt away, spaces open up, and then I work to make sure that it becomes a space that's going to feel right to





The original concrete brick fireplace was shabby looking and closed off the kitchen. Hill gutted it in order to create more space and increase access to the home's entry points. He hid its ugly seams with beetle kill pine panels and sanded down the concrete to a modern, smooth finish. "I love the beauty of a fireplace," Hill says. "It's a gathering point and a place for community—it brings warmth to a home."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATIE JENKINS PHOTOGRAPHY ; COURTESY RUCKER DESIGN BUILD



BEFORE

The Hills were drawn to the home's overall style and low roofline. They kept the original aluminum siding but brightened the place siding, native plant xeriscaping, gravel beds, and new garage doors with insulated translucent glass.



AFTER



BEFORE

The backyard was transformed from a barren weed garden with drainage problems into a gorgeous Colorado-scape complete with irrigated raised garden beds. "We repurpose whatever we can," Hill says. The patio firepit was made from stone salvaged from the living room fireplace, and the stumps arranged around it were found strewn about the yard.



AFTER

walk into—so that the people living there can appreciate it and feel good in it."

Hill and his wife Rebecca joined forces to start Rucker Design Build in 2010 and are transforming Fort Collins living spaces with a fresh and intentional approach to modern home building and design.

One of the duo's recent projects, the complete remodel of a mid-century home in a City Park neighborhood, exemplifies their ability to unlock a home's hidden potential—with an artist's eye and the hard skills to back it up.

This modest three-bedroom, three-bath 1,711-square-foot home with a two-car garage on a quarter acre lot was in sad shape before the Hills arrived on the scene. The neglected front and back yards were weed-stricken disaster areas. The shabby interior was chock-full of strange proportions and clunky uses of space, with a monolithic, outdated fireplace dominating the living room.

The Hills saw past all that, focused on the home's good bones and nice general layout, and rolled up their sleeves. The wholesale transformation is immediately apparent from the sidewalk curb, where xeriscaped landscaping consisting

mostly of native plants that can be found in the foothills west of town entices one up to the home in subtly elevated phases.

"I've always liked homes that have a bit of elevation to them," Hill says. "You can use the landscaping to build up some romance." He taught himself to weld in order to edge all of the beds with custom metal banding.

A rustic, rough-cut log fence made from local timber encloses the lot, extending from the front yard to the back, where an old mudroom was converted into a lively outdoor patio space complete with a fire pit made of stone salvaged from the remodel of the indoor fireplace.

Bamboo-like sumacs give the backyard a zen quality and ornamental "Blonde Ambition" blue grama grass dances in the wind. Honey locust trees, with their unique leaf structure that provide privacy and just enough shade from the hot afternoon sun without blocking the dramatic mountain views, provide seasons of color. And irrigated raised garden beds give the backyard a homey, welcoming feel.



BEFORE

Clean, modern, and sleek, the kitchen now makes more efficient use of space and ties the home together. Custom yellow lighting picks up the carefully placed yellow tiles in the new backsplash.



AFTER



BEFORE

Sometimes a fix doesn't even have to be epic to be dramatic--fresh fixtures, paint, trim, and a reimagined layout gave this shoebox bedroom a hip lounge feel.



AFTER

A major theme in all Rucker Design Build projects is the use of repurposed materials and raw natural elements. Beetlekill pine accents, sourced from Forks Lumber Co. in Laporte, punctuate this home's updated exterior and enliven almost every facet of its reimagined interior.

"I love working with beautiful wood like this that has life and character to it," Hill says. His original use of beetle kill pine includes slated accent walls, which help define the kitchen and living room space while still allowing it to feel open, and using it to panel all four walls of the powder bath.

"Powder baths are small, and often left too simple and untouched, so it's fun to give them a wow factor," Hill says. "It's where all of your guest are going to end up, so you might as well knock their socks off."

Another hallmark of Hill's work is creating living spaces that bring the outside in, using similar materials on the exterior and interior so that everything connects and flows together, expanding one's sense of home

rather than confining it to the inside.

For example, the size, horizontal shape, and low placement of a window in the master bedroom allows the homeowners to wake up to mountain views. A set of windows in the master bathroom and bedroom are aligned just right so that when one walks down the hallway, they can see all the way through to the backyard. A small addition to the back of the house is now a lush-feeling master bath, with a full glass door that opens up to the backyard—not only for natural light and views, but so the homeowners can soak in the freestanding tub with the door open in springtime.

The Hills expanded the interior's formerly chopped-up space and flooded it with natural light. The heavy colors and Cold-War era type furnishings were replaced with all things modern, clean, and spacious. White oak floors with a clear, water-based finish bring out the natural elements of the wood replaced old carpet and flooring.

IT'S IN THE DETAILS

Rucker and Rebecca's well-thought-out homes are like Swiss Army Knives—they contain everything a homeowner needs while making efficient use of space. "I like things to work really well and make sense," Hill says. The little things that most people don't notice or think of can dramatically shape the overall experience of a home. Here are some ideas worth stealing:

■ In the master bath's seamless shower, Hill carved out a shelf in the tile for leg-shaving ease. "I like to do little things like that—so that everyone in the home has a little something that makes them feel special," he says.

■ Blow dryers and curling irons piled in an unsightly tangled mess on the bathroom counter is a pet peeve of Hill's, so he put outlets under the cabinet so that they can remain forever put away.

■ USB plugs are thoughtfully placed in the kitchen and master closet, and an unobtrusive yet comprehensive speaker system allows for music to be played throughout the home, including in the master bath.

■ Hill, who has a real estate background, makes an effort to take care of what typically comes back on inspection reports. Here, for example, he replaced sheetrock so that the whole home was insulated. "I also like to reinforce everything," he says. "No one wants annoyances, even small ones like flimsy toilet paper holders, causing problems down the road."

■ From dimmers and diamond-cut fixtures that scatter prisms of light to high-efficiency LED's and mirrored bulbs that make an impact without being too bright, all of the home's lighting is custom. "Light is so important for creating the overall mood and feel of a home," Hill says. "I like natural light, so I put windows in the master closet. I also like wall-to-wall recessed lights and used extra beetle kill siding to create boxes in the ceiling for cleaner lines throughout the home."

■ The décor light switches don't have screws—a minute, eye-pleasing detail that goes a long way. They're also positioned lower than standard height to compliment the way our bodies are built and to leave unimpeded space to hang art.



Removing two old closets and changing out windows and doors opened up the master bedroom. "The new master window allows for mountain views while lying in bed," Hill says. A new addition off the back of the house made room for a walk-in closet.



The concrete and brick fireplace that once closed off the kitchen is now pared down and sleek. Quartz countertops and custom tile backsplashes dazzle in the kitchen and bathrooms. Strategic pops of color throughout the home keep it tasteful yet simple. The stylish and inviting overall effect is mountain-modern meets L.A. contemporary.

When the Hills set out to design and build a home, they aim not only for a stunning and polished final product—they also want the homeowner's quality of life to dramatically improve just by occupying the space. "We want everything from their work to their family life to be positively impacted by the home—we even want the dogs to be happy," Hill says.

In this case, the proud new homeowners, and their dog, feel that the home was made just for them. "We wanted something unique and fell in love with this place the moment we walked in the front door," they said. "We didn't just buy a house, it's a work of art." FC

