

## REWORKED RANCH

**COMPACT U-STYLE** The U-shaped arrangement works efficiently in the kitchen. Additional space-enhancing choices are the new skylight, the bird's-eye maple cabinets (which run all the way to the ceiling), dark granite flooring and white glass backsplashes.

# Retro Efficiency

With the kids out of the house, it was time for a style makeover.

BY BARBARA BALLINGER

### 1,500-SQUARE-FOOT CALIFORNIA RANCH

- **STRUCTURE:** Single-family house
- **STYLE:** Transitional/contemporary
- **RENOVATIONS:** Kitchen and bathroom remodeled; porch and deck added
- **BIGGEST SMALL-SPACE DESIGN CHALLENGE:** Having enough seating for dining because of desire to entertain frequently
- **BEST SMALL-SPACE SOLUTION:** Turning third bedroom into a TV/sitting room that opens to the living room
- **ADVANTAGES TO SMALL-SPACE LIVING:** Cozy feeling and less maintenance
- **BIGGEST DISADVANTAGE:** Not enough storage in every room
- **HOMEOWNER SUGGESTIONS:** Try to open rooms onto other rooms by removing walls, and make kitchen a part of living space
- ★ **GOOD SOURCES FOR SMALL-ROOM DESIGN:** Hire a good designer and contractor for a professional look and tips

PHOTOS BY NICK NOVELLI PHOTOGRAPHY



**EATING LIGHT** The dining table in the kitchen was placed directly against the window to save space and take advantage of outdoor light and views.



**F**OR 20 YEARS, DESIGNER MARY SUSAN BICICCHI AND HER TWO CHILDREN LIVED IN A 1,500-square-foot house in Clarendon Hills, Illinois. But after the children flew the nest, Bicicchi gained a new occupant—her second husband, Bruce Wilbright, whom she lovingly refers to as “my Prince Charming.”

They decided to settle in her home, which both of them loved, but they knew it would have to change to reflect their tastes. “Instead of keeping everything the same, we made it a new, larger space, with Bruce definitely part of the design process,” says Mary Susan, owner of Interiors by Mary Susan ([ibmsdesign.com](http://ibmsdesign.com) and [livebeautifullybmys](http://livebeautifullybmys)) in LaGrange, Illinois.



**OPEN FOR BUSINESS** A white sink with an open shelf beneath visually enlarges the space (vertical floor-to-ceiling cabinets on each side provide more storage), while a mirror installed atop another mirror gives the room a greater sense of depth.



### More Space...Affordably

To make the small rooms function better for two adults, Mary Susan used a number of her favorite structural and decorating tricks—the same ones she recommends to clients living in small spaces. She took down a wall between the living room and the adjacent third bedroom, adding non-light-blocking French doors to make it into a cozy TV/sitting room.

To extend the entire footprint in the most affordable way, she added a three-season room that she and Bruce use from April through November as well as a small deck that overlooks their bucolic setting. She also added skylights in the master bathroom and kitchen for more natural light, which expands space visually. For the same reason, she hung at least one mirror in each room.

Despite the belief that large patterns and vibrant colors make small rooms look smaller,

Mary Susan finds that the opposite holds true. She used a lively mix of white, black and kiwi green in most rooms, hung large-scale patterned wallpaper and draperies, and kept many floors bare, another eye-fooling trick to make spaces appear more expansive.

### What to Keep?

As she does with clients in similar situations, both she and Bruce made piles to decide what to keep and what to discard. He kept his 1940s vintage Heywood-Wakefield furnishings (including his grandmother’s dining room set), all of which were used to furnish the home’s basement. Mary Susan then gave her husband three choices for new furnishings—enough variety but not so much to choose from that it would be overwhelming.

“I knew I wanted an upholstered headboard, since we both like to read in bed, for instance,



comfort for all

Seating encircles a large ottoman so everyone can get comfortable. Mirrors on either side of the fireplace expand the room’s small dimensions and boost light.

### SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Two of Mary Susan’s design rules are to use big, bold wallpaper patterns to make small rooms look larger and to add a surprise; the kiwi green hue, far left, is used on walls, seating and artwork for unity.



✓ **GET THE LOOK**  
hollywood style

Glamming it up comes naturally to designer Mary Susan Biccichi. “Small and ordinary spaces can become quite extraordinary with the right glamorous details, textures and color combinations,” she says. Each room in her home gained some Hollywood-style fantasy and fun. To create your own:

**1. Dress Formal.** In her living room, Mary Susan added a deep, 20" satin black hem to the sheer white-and-black striped draperies; the combination of white and black says timeless tuxedo elegance, she says.

**2. Be Bold with Color.** To dress up the charcoal-gray upholstered couches, she added bold contrast in the form of kiwi-green satin-damask pillows, which match the green of the ottoman.

**3. Use Deco Designs.** In Mary Susan's bathroom, another take on black and white comes from the white lacquered high-gloss cabinets and honed dark tiles.

**4. Add Opulence.** Large-scale vivid wallpaper does the trick in the sitting room. “It adds lots of character to what once was a small white box,” Mary Susan says.

**5. Light it Sexy.** The master bedroom features matching transparent bubble-glass lamps sporting black shades. Extra bling comes from a crystal chandelier.

**6. Embrace Your Curves.** Curvy shapes in a large scale, such as the bathroom's rounded-edge sink and its mirror-within-a-mirror, give a tiny spot a luxurious feel.

so I presented him with three choices and let him select,” she says. And because Bruce likes to put up his feet, she included comfortable, practical furnishings, including a big ottoman in the living room that is large enough to rest a tray for drinks and snacks. Throughout their home, she incorporated many of her favorite artworks from their travels and her gallery, Mary Vincent Fine Art Gallery, which is conveniently located adjacent to her design studio ([maryvincentgallery.com](http://maryvincentgallery.com)).

Gradually, what started as Mary Susan's home has become theirs, and the process was made smoother and more manageable thanks to Mary Susan following her own bit of advice that she gives to clients living small: “When you bring in something new, something already there must go to avoid crowding rooms!” Case closed.



**1930s GLAMOUR**

The bedroom has a 1930s Hollywood-style glamour. The fabric used for the drapery is a faux silk with embossed velvet. The hand-felted wool throw and deconstructed pillow are part of Mary Susan's new home accessories collection, found online at [livebeautifullybys.com](http://livebeautifullybys.com).

**ABOVE & BEYOND**

A new skylight helps make the bathroom look larger—so did getting rid of a 60" tub.

**DOUBLE VISION** The dining room table was placed adjacent to a mirrored wall to expand space; with leaves the table can seat 10 comfortably. Sheer white drapes go to the ceiling to play up the room's verticality.

