

COUNTRY ALMANAC®
NO. 142 ■ FALL 2011

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Small Room DECORATING

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Storage-Minded



A mother and daughter transformed their San Francisco split-level with color, storage and idiosyncratic finds.

BY BARBARA BALLINGER

WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNER MARY JO FIORELLA and daughter Gabbi, 7, outgrew their 1,000-square-foot house in a San Francisco Bay suburb, they went hunting for a new place that would give Mary Jo a more functional home office and Gabbi a bigger play yard. After a long search, they found a 1950s-era split-level that met both generations' needs—and then some.

"Because of work and being a single mom, I really didn't have time to renovate, so I wanted a move-in-ready home," Mary Jo says. The house, while still small, measures 1,680 square feet, so it offers Mary Jo a big home office, good traffic flow, natural light and a generous backyard, which is within view of the kitchen, so Mary Jo can keep an eye on her daughter.

Making Rooms Do More

The home's bones, oak floors and kitchen were in good shape, so most of the decorating focused on new paint colors, good storage to maximize space, and the rearrangement of existing furnishings as well as new flea market finds.

Since she turned the family room into her office, Mary Jo needed the living room to function as a place for her and her daughter to unwind, play and eat casually in front of the TV. By angling and orienting an existing red sofa and a green club chair toward the TV, Mary Jo gained an intimate conversation grouping with a little portable table for snacks, plus good circulation in that room as well as to other spaces. Behind the seating, she placed two large armoires that she already owned; they house Gabbi's toys and crafts and her mom's art supplies.



EASY LIVING

Matching black-painted armoires flank a small dresser, above, all of which are used to stash both generations' essentials. "I had the armoires in other homes, and they've served so many purposes," owner Mary Jo Fiorella says.

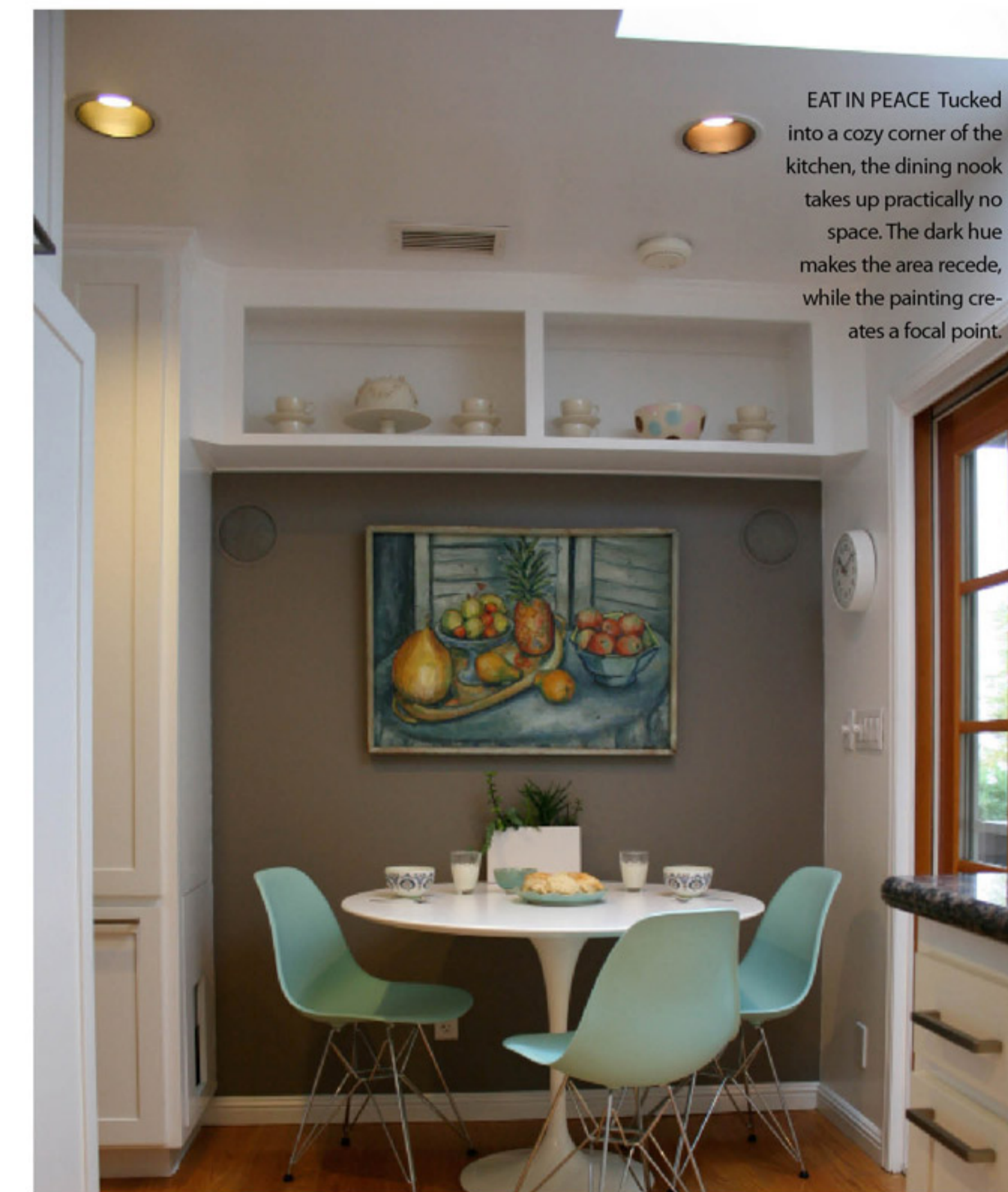
WARM THOUGHTS

A compact fireplace, above left, adds definition to the living room; the portable rocker can be moved from place to place, as necessary.

1,680-SQUARE-FOOT BUNGALOW

- **STRUCTURE:** Contemporary 1950s split-level
- **DECORATING STYLE:** Eclectic/contemporary
- **NUMBER OF RESIDENTS:** Two, plus a dog
- **RENOVATIONS:** A skylight in the kitchen for more natural light
- **BIGGEST DESIGN CHALLENGES:** Personalizing space; making the kitchen seem larger and brighter
- **BEST SMALL-SPACE SOLUTION:** Adding armoires for storage of everything from toys to art supplies in living room

- **BIGGEST ADVANTAGE TO SMALL-SPACE LIVING:** Not letting clutter overwhelm by continuing to edit things
- **BIGGEST DISADVANTAGE:** Not having enough room for out-of-town guests and large groups of friends
- **HOMEOWNER SUGGESTIONS:** Make spaces serve double duty by being creative in furniture choices
- ★ **GOOD SOURCES FOR SMALL-ROOM DESIGN:** The Container Store, Ikea, Room & Board, Arteriors Home



EAT IN PEACE Tucked into a cozy corner of the kitchen, the dining nook takes up practically no space. The dark hue makes the area recede, while the painting creates a focal point.



bits & pieces

Mary Jo found her bed in bad shape at a yard sale, took it home, refinished it, and it now looks amazing! The nightstands' open shelves and the cutwork of the lamps both add an airy effect.

KID-FRIENDLY Though Gabbi likes blue and pink, her mom boldly introduced lime green walls to make the other colors pop. "It gives the room a fresh, happy feeling," Mary Jo says. The storage cubicle came from Ikea; the bed is from Pottery Barn.



Warming Up Neutrals

Mary Jo also prefers using soft, neutral backgrounds (often grays or taupes) to let her finds and artwork pop and to make small spaces seem larger. In the living room, the walls above the chair railing were painted a gray that has a touch of green (Benjamin Moore, Revere Pewter); in the kitchen, where she used a favorite Saarinen table and turquoise Eames chairs, Mary Jo painted the main walls white and one accent wall a deep taupe (Benjamin Moore, Taos Taupe); her office is a warm neutral (Benjamin Moore, Monroe Bisque); and Gabbi's room became a zesty lime (Benjamin Moore, Dill Pickle), which complements the little girl's favorite pinks and blues.

Even though Mary Jo has practiced design for almost a decade, she learned new lessons from her own redo. She plans to use even more neutral furnishings so she can mix in more lively accent colors as trends change.

GET THE LOOK decorate a dining nook

No matter how small, every space can have style with a few simple tricks; here, designer Mary Jo Fiorella helps make your eating area more palatable

✓ **CARVE OUT A NICHE.** Sometimes, the architecture does it for you—as in the cozy dining nook above—but if not, define your own intimate dining area by creating a series of vignettes, which create visual interest and make a space look more significant.

✓ **PAINT ONE WALL IN A DIFFERENT, BOLDER ACCENT HUE.** Mary Jo's dining nook features Benjamin Moore's Taos Taupe, which plays effectively off the crisp white walls, ceiling, trim and wood-framed door, adding depth to the space.

✓ **MAKE ART A PRIORITY.** Add a prominent piece that visitors might not necessarily expect to be in a kitchen. Look around your home and, if necessary, move something from a living room or bedroom.

✓ **KEEP THE SAME FLOORING THROUGHOUT THE MAIN SPACES.**

Consistency will visually increase the square footage and help keep the whole house uniform, designwise.

✓ **OPT FOR AN INTERESTING DINING SET.** If your dining area has strong angles, introduce a round table (here, a Saarinen classic). Extend it out of the space a bit. Liven up the look by adding color in the chairs. These turquoise Eames chairs pack a vital, unexpected and friendly punch.

✓ **LET IN LIGHT.** Spotlight the nook from above with recessed cans, and try to incorporate plenty of natural light, too. It always makes a room look bigger; in addition, it adds the element of the outdoors.