

Surrounded by Windows

LANE WILLIAMS, the architect for this simple ranch house remodel in Washington State, made modifications to the window configurations throughout the house and relocated the kitchen to transform it into a place of beauty and warmth. The views to the north, toward the ocean, were already spectacular. But the windows in the original house, built in the early 1970s, did little to enhance them. As with most ranch houses, the old windows were standard casements (“crank-outs”) surrounded by basic moldings. Because the views were north facing, and no thought had been given to light from other directions, the house seemed subdued and a little gloomy as there was never any direct sunlight in the main living spaces. What Williams accomplished with the redesign was to position the new set of windows to more elegantly frame the views on the north side. And he introduced



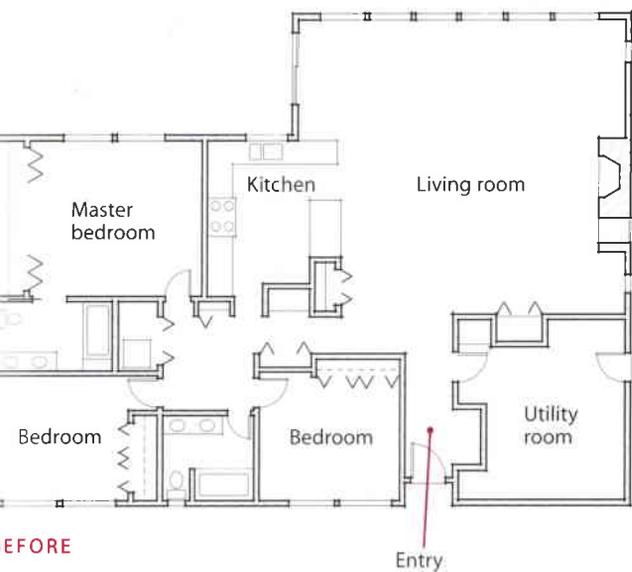
some major living spaces on the south side of the house, to provide access for south light.

In place of the original double pair of casements in the master bedroom, for example, Williams added a gracious sitting bay surrounded by windows. Even the corners of the bay are opened to the view, so there’s the sense that the entire window seat extends into the landscape. The resulting connection within the room to the surrounding views is pronounced. Had the window area been made smaller and the corner windows removed, there’d be far less connection established. The windowsill is only a few inches above the height of the cushion, which means that the ocean view is visible from the bed. Had the sill been higher, the view would have disappeared.



PICTURE THIS

The new bedroom window bay in this remodeled ranch house is made almost entirely of windows. Remove the corner windows and it feels like a much more interior space with much less connection to the surroundings and the ocean beyond.



The room would still be light filled and dramatic as you walked through the space, but the most exceptional feature of the site would have been hidden from view when the owners were in bed.

Williams used a similar technique in the new kitchen (see the photo on p. 150). The old kitchen had a narrow access to the ocean view, but there was no place for an informal eating area. So the decision was made to move the kitchen to the south side of the house and to include a bay to accommodate an informal eating area. By opening the wall between the living room and the kitchen, southern light can also be seen from the living room. The walls in the eating bay serve as reflecting surfaces to bounce more daylight into the room. The window configuration is identical to the one in the master bedroom, except that here there's also a row of transom windows above, allowing more of the view of the surrounding trees to enter. The pattern of the lower windows is reflected in the

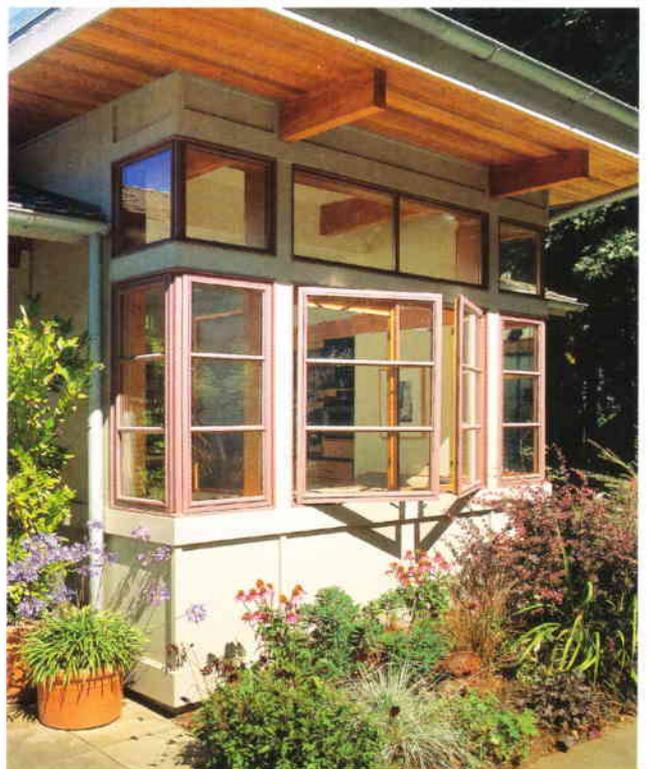
upper ones, creating a beautiful composition both inside and out. On the exterior, the window frames were painted a different color to draw attention to the design. This is a good example of how color can be used to accentuate the Differentiation of Parts.

The simple geometry of the window pattern and the sense of openness amid containment, in combination with the reflecting wall and the direct sunlight bathing the sitting area, give the nook a warm glow that's highly seductive. I can easily imagine sitting here each morning, soaking up the sunshine with a cup of coffee and feeling that all is right with the world. You can get a taste from this photo of the sense of well-being that can arise from a beautifully designed and crafted space.

The living room is by far the largest room in the house, and with its wide expanse of glass it provides little obstruction to the view. But without a well-composed grouping of windows even a



With a wide connecting view between living room and kitchen, the sunny feeling of the eating alcove lends warmth to the space.



The bumped-out eating alcove acts as a "daylight fixture," drawing light in as well as providing shelter for family meals.



Framed with continuous wood trim, the wall of windows in the living room is designed as the thinnest of membranes between inside and out, allowing the spectacular view to come right into the room.

great view like this would become much less dramatic. If each window were treated as a separate object, with its own casing, the composition would lose its cohesion and end up looking awkward. One's eye would tend to stop at the wall, rather than looking through it to the view beyond.

Williams decided to provide cross-ventilation for the room with windows on the east and west walls, so none of the windows on the north face needed to be openable. This allowed each pane to be larger than if it were an opening casement, and of course there is also no need for a screen, which can be an impediment to the clarity of the view.

Taken all together, the house has transcended its ranch-style roots and become an exceptional home that takes full advantage of its extraordinary site. Just because a house is bland in its original design doesn't mean that it can't easily be

upgraded to a place of style and substance. It simply needs the touch of someone who knows and understands light and composition to tweak it here and there to bring out its best features and to capitalize on the natural assets of the site.



From the outside, the home's simple ranch-house roots are clearly evident.