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By giving up a tiny second bedroom, homeowner Lili Weigert expanded the living room and kitchen alcove in her cottage.

FIRST HOUSE

Earthquake-era cottage measures up at 630 square feet

Talk about sweat equity. First-time home buyer Lili Weigert, an account planner for an advertising firm, estimates that she removed nearly a ton of debris from the Noe Valley cottage she bought in January.

Much of that was from the overgrown courtyard garden where bougainvillea and ivy all but smothered the 630-square-foot, circa 1906 era home, making it appear even smaller.

"It was a real jungle out here. You couldn't even see the bricks on the patio," she said. The now tidy yard boasts mature camellias and rhododendrons, as well as a towering Egyptian tree fern.

Out also went old plumbing fixtures, carpet and linoleum. Down came a wall that separated a tiny second bedroom from the living room.

"The biggest change was taking the wall out . . . that really opened everything up," she said. The revamped living room and kitchen alcove now stretches more than 22 feet from front to back. Newly refinished sub-floors add a rustic note, while a fresh coat of white paint throughout unifies the space.

Because Weigert and her friend, Seth Roberts, did most of the work themselves, costs were kept down. How much work, exactly?

"That's hard to say," Weigert said. "Basically from January until I moved

Jerome Gagnon *Smart Living in Small Spaces*

in April, I worked practically every weekend, as well as many evenings after work . . . and when I wasn't working I was thinking about it." Roberts clocked in at 200 hours.

New butcher block countertops from MacBeath Hardwood replaced worn

laminates in the kitchen, while a custom-built peninsula, designed by Roberts, has many uses. "It's great as an extra work surface or for dining and it can function as a buffet, too," Weigert said.

The bathroom came in for a much-needed makeover. Wainscoting of plywood bead board added period character, while replacing the standard tub with a claw-foot model continued the vintage theme.

After pricing refinished tubs locally,

Weigert learned she could order one from Tub King in Alabama, including shipping costs, for about \$300 less. "It was painless. They took care of all the shipping and delivery, and I could sense how honest they were, so I never worried about anything," she said.

Weigert also replaced the 1960s vanity with an oval sink centered in a granite slab, a lucky find purchased for just \$50. A new skylight brought in much needed light to the dark room, making it appear larger and more inviting.

A big luxury for the former apartment dweller is the stacked washer/dryer unit that was installed in a small utility closet between the kitchen and bath.

Tucked behind many of San Francisco's Victorians and vintage apartment buildings are simple wood-framed cottages, some dating from just after the 1906 earthquake. Hastily erected to house the newly displaced, they were often not much more than two- or three-room shacks with a kitchen and bath tacked on at the rear.

More recent "granny units" were built specifically for in-laws. Both offer alternatives for those struggling to gain a foothold in the city's high-priced market. Weigert's earthquake-era cottage was part of a tenants-in-common deal in which three flats in the main building and the rear cottage were of-



A brick-paved patio adds an outdoor "room," effectively expanding the living space of Weigert's tiny cottage located behind a larger building in Noe Valley.



Photos by MARK CONSTANTINI / The Chronicle

The sunny kitchen with butcher block peninsula flows into the living room. The paneled ceiling and wood subfloor that Weigert refinished provide architectural interest.

Cottage

► SMALL

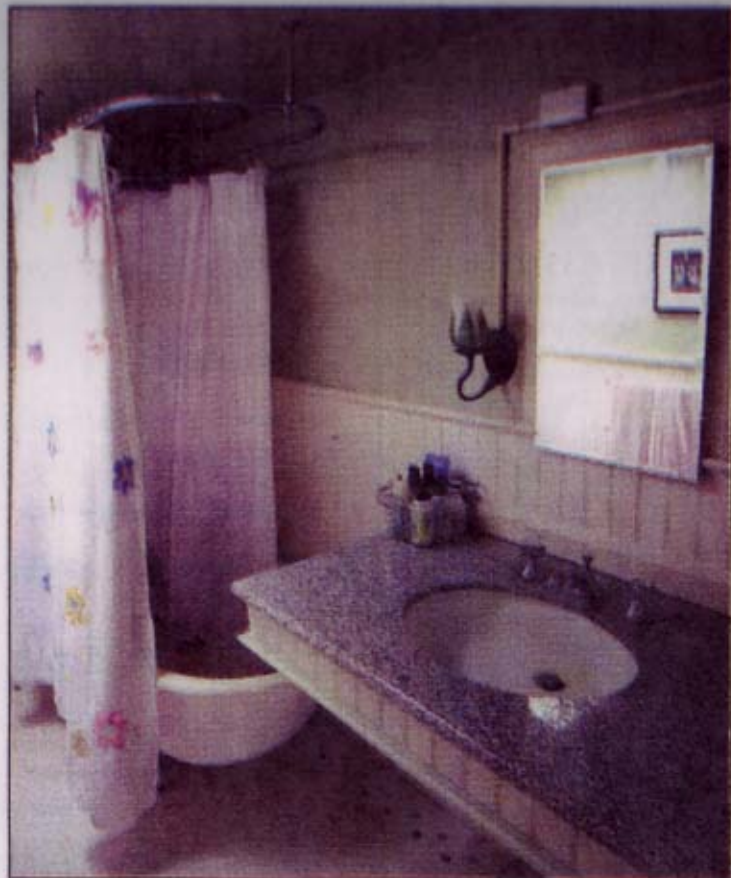
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ferred vacant to buyers. (Unlike condominiums, where purchasers own a specific unit, tenants in common share ownership of the entire property, although they usually occupy a specific unit in that property.)

"All my friends came by and said I shouldn't buy it because it was so dirty and dark," she recalled. "My mother was a little more encouraging. She said, 'I just want you to keep in mind how much work it will be.'"

Weigert, who is single, learned of the sale on Craigslist.com and joined with two couples to acquire the property in common. Assured by reports that the cottage was sound, but in need of foundation work, she purchased her share for \$388,000, which entitles her to both the cottage and the adjacent patio.

"The only things I saw for under \$400,000 were one-bedroom condos, and that's not what I wanted. The thing that's so nice here is that it's free-standing, and so I never have people walking above me or below me. When I come home late at night and want to play music, I can do that," she said. Real estate agent Ginger Karels, who specializes in the Noe Valley neighborhood, says, "Having experienced small-space living, I can say I'd rather have a



Beadboard paneling coordinates the vanity base and wainscoting.

cottage in Noe Valley than a mansion in Mayville, N.D. Space is almost never the issue, it's about location more than anything."

Surveying the scene from Weigert's sunny patio, it's hard to believe she's just a streetcar ride from downtown San Francisco and a short walk to the bustle of 24th Street shopping.

Would she trade her cottage

for, say, a McMansion in the Midwest? "For my first home, this is perfect for me because I can see and appreciate every single thing I do. I'd be completely overwhelmed by a huge place right now, and for my lifestyle I have all the space I need. Besides, I'm pretty busy right now, so something bigger would probably be too much too keep up."

Tips for maximizing space

► Create extended sightlines and free-flowing spaces by removing unnecessary walls. Although Lili Weigert gave up a tiny second bedroom, the expanded living room includes zones for work and study, as well as the occasional overnight guest.

► Take advantage of outdoor areas. Weigert's private patio provides an additional 450 square feet of living space that's ideal for container gardening, entertaining or relaxing to the sound of water splashing in the fountain.

► When houses are built out to the property line, additional windows aren't always an option. You can bring more light into a dark kitchen or bath, as well as provide additional ventilation, with easy-to-install tubular skylights.

► Look for bargains. When it came to furnishings and accessories, Weigert used more imagination than cash. The affordable chandelier in her living room was



A friend hand-painted this chandelier for the living room.

hand-painted by a friend to resemble a more expensive one she saw in *W* magazine. She used Craig's List online to locate a pair of weathered wicker chairs for the patio, and the seller threw in a portable bar-

becue, all for \$50.

► If you can swing it, splurge on one thing you really love. For Weigert, it was the French, hand-embroidered fabric with a butterfly motif that she used for cafe curtains for living room windows. Although the fabric was pricey (\$400 at Britex), the curtains can be recycled later as pillow coverings, if and when she moves.

► Don't worry if everything doesn't match. A coat of white paint can disguise a multitude of sins, unifying disparate elements such as veneered kitchen cabinets and patchwork paneling.

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Resources

Uni Tile & Marble, 6199 Third St., San Francisco. (415) 822-8858.

MacBeath Hardwood, 2150 Oakdale Ave., San Francisco. (415)

647-0782. www.macbeath.com.

Tub King, 32 A Samford Ave., Opelika, AL 36801. (888) 920-5464; www.tubking.com. —J.G.