

# RADICAL SURGERY

By Joan Waters

## *A physician reconstructs a California Rambler.*

Is there anything that screams “make me over” as loudly as small, dark rooms clustered around a weather-weary courtyard decked with funky, 1960s-ish wrought-iron gates and lighting fixtures? OK, even if you’ve seen equally atrocious architectural oddities, have you ever bought a house *full* of them? Richard Latchaw, M.D., did. Instead of being put off by the Sierra Oaks one-story he calls a “California Rambler,” Latchaw actually was attracted to it. “This house sat on the market for a long time,” he says. “When I walked in, I loved the possibilities. But being surgical by nature, I thought there’s only one way to attack this house. You have to be aggressive, and you have to start with thinking about what you are going to do with that middle space . . . you’ve just got to be radical.”

As an interventional neuroradiologist and chief of neuroradiology at UC Davis Medical Center, Latchaw is ready when radical is what’s called for. “If you need your brain tumor evaluated or your stroke or aneurysm fixed, you come and see me,” he says. Which explains why he took a surgical approach to transform the Rambler into an award-winning, light-drenched California contemporary. The job took 14 months and began almost as soon as the escrow papers were signed in December 2004.

*Photography by Terry Nathan Photography, courtesy of Morse Remodeling Inc. and Custom Homes*







Latchaw brought in Davis architect Ron Vogel of Vogel Architecture, Marty Morse of Morse Remodeling Inc. and Custom Homes of Davis, and Santa Monica-based interior designer Tonie Silva de Pimienta to help. Seven months later, they had a design plan. Then, Latchaw says, “We took this mother down to the foundation.”

Structurally speaking, they had to. Latchaw wanted a home that would showcase his world-class collection of art and Asian furnishings. He wanted symmetry, serenity and individuality. Above all, he wanted space: “Open, open, open,” he says. Out went superfluous walls and up went the ceiling height. At the heart of the home (once the open courtyard) is a 1,100-square-foot uninterrupted expanse that begins at the front door and flows 46 feet to the kitchen and TV/family room at the back. A 21-foot, skylight-crowned vaulted ceiling is centered over the grand space; large dormers with clerestory windows top each roof slope. For the floor, Brazilian hardwood planks were laid on the diagonal to engage the eye, lead it through the space and out a wall of windows, where it lands on a sensuous and solitary obelisk by the pool.

Creating a sense of intimacy without walls was no easy task—especially because nobody wanted “been-there, done-that” stuff. So instead of a formal entry, remodeler Morse built a custom stand for an intricately inlaid decorative screen that neatly obscures the main space from anyone who just happens to pop in. (Morse’s work on the home won him the 2007 Contractor of the Year award in the Entire House Over \$1,000,000 category from the Sacramento chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.)

Behind the screen is a cozy lounge outfitted with four silk-covered club chairs grouped around a low table. Separating that space from the family/TV area is a whopper of a room divider: a 500-gallon aquarium teeming with a rainbow of glistening saltwater fish. Morse built the aquarium cabinetry, too; its black finish ties in with the home’s Asian-style baseboards, window trim and architecturally dominant



surface-mounted sliding doors. When open, each door reveals a private space: There's an exercise room, dual offices and a luxurious, sequestered master bedroom suite. While the doors' panels look like rice paper, they're actually made of frosted glass.

"We were combining a contemporary, modern style with an Asian flavor," says interior designer Silva de Pimienta, who weighed in on everything from the slate on the entry floor to the height of the baseboards (six inches). She picked out furnishings, window treatments, bedding and custom-made silk rugs that would work with Latchaw's existing pieces. She had all of the interior walls painted a soothing color she calls "pastry," and in the kitchen, she topped mahogany cabinets with "antique" granite (so named for its honed finish, not its age). All appliances, including a closet-size wine cooler, are stainless steel. To punch up the cabinetry, she handpicked each knob and drawer pull. Other ooh-aah features are everywhere: a pop-up venting system for the cooktop, an under-the-baseboard vacuum slot and a bevy of adjustable leather barstools that can float from the dining nook to a 9-foot-long, keyhole-shaped, candy-colored slab of laminated glass that serves as the kitchen island. The end of the island is curved, Latchaw jokes, so he has a comfortable place to rest his elbow when he's hanging out in the kitchen.

While a floor plan this flexible wouldn't work for everyone, Latchaw revels in the freedom it offers. "This is an adult house," he says. "That's the key."

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