

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE LABOR OF LOVE



BRETT AND RENÉ GAVE their dark bungalow a lift with bright white paint and low, minimal landscaping. A new wooden fence (at right) laid horizontally echoes the original clapboard siding.

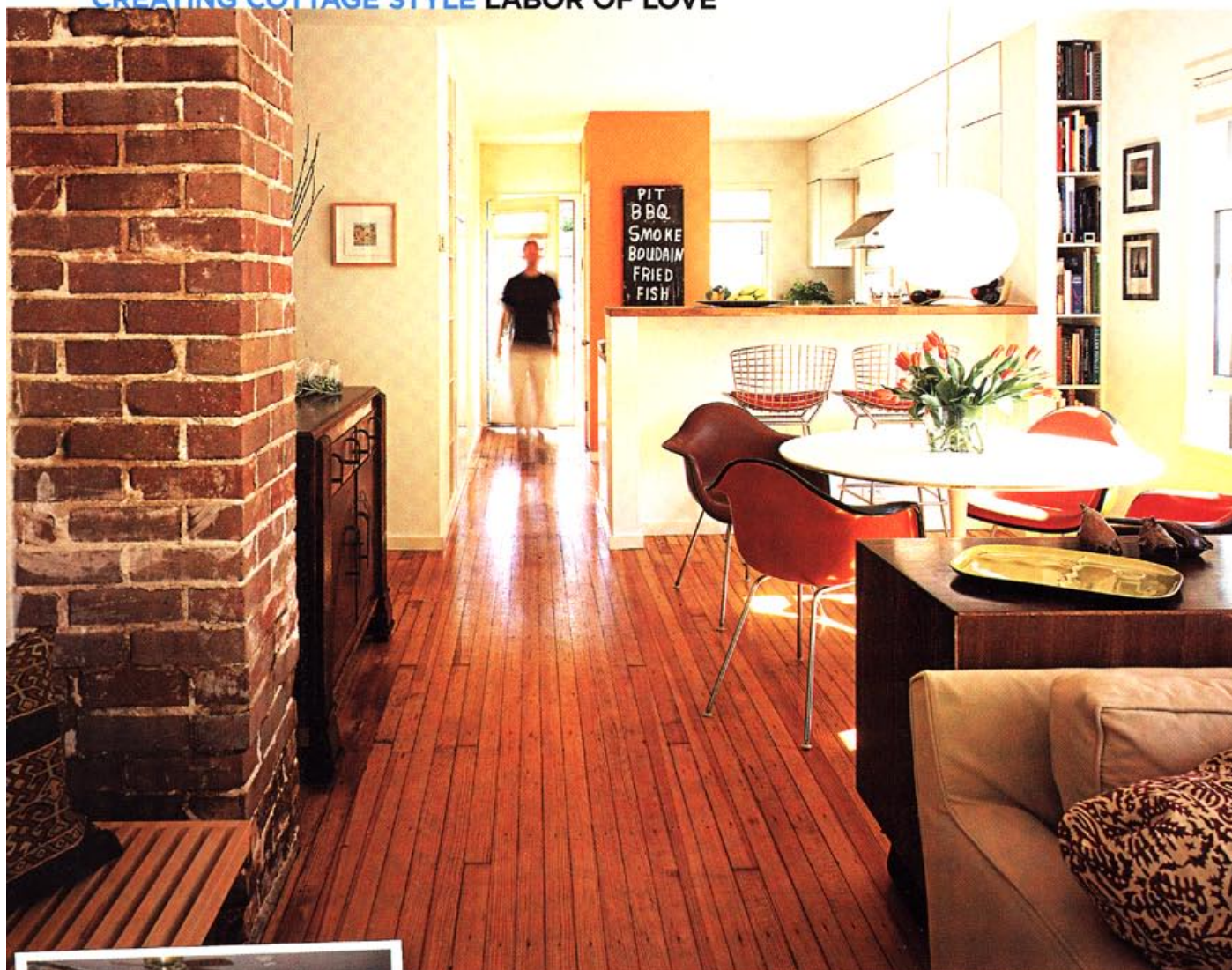
“We wanted to restore the character”

René and Brett Zamore lost the dated exterior but saved the charm of their '20s Texas cottage

THE MORNING THEY BOUGHT their 1923 fixer-upper in historic Houston Heights, Brett Zamore and his fiancée, René, made a deal: “I told René, ‘You handle the wedding; I’ll handle the house,’” recalls Brett. He promised to oversee the renovation of the run-down, 920-square-foot bungalow just in time for the big event, only four months away.

“I had in mind a kitchen and bath redo,” René says with a laugh, remembering her shock upon driving up to the cottage the afternoon of their closing. “The roof was halfway off, and it looked like the house was getting leveled! Within days, there wasn’t a lick of Sheetrock in the house.” For some couples, this could have spelled disaster, but René knew it was a smart move. Brett, an architectural designer >

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE LABOR OF LOVE



ORIGINAL PINE FLOORS and an exposed brick chimney add rustic warmth to the interior. The couple removed a wall between the dining area and kitchen and then painted one closet wall bright orange "to draw the eye back and create a focal point," Brett says.

committed to small-space design, had been looking for an old cottage to restore. She felt certain her groom could stick to both a quick deadline and a tight budget. "He has a great attention to detail and knows what you can save on, like countertops and cabinets, and what you have to spend more money for, like good plumbing," she says.

With the clock ticking, Brett focused on the mission: to keep the cottage's original allure and integrity intact while updating it to reflect the couple's modern tastes. To save money, he did much of the work himself. "We put in a lot of sweat equity, which is why we were able to get so much out of our budget," he says. René pitched in, too. "I came over every night to help, and all of our weekends were devoted to the house," she says. "Everybody told us, 'If you can make it through this, your marriage is definitely going to last.'"

While it was important to Brett to preserve the bungalow's facade, he started from scratch on the inside. "In an old house, sometimes it's better to gut the interior completely to make it more energy efficient," he says. Plagued by a choppy floor plan with too many swinging doors eating up precious space, the cottage's layout became open and fluid with Brett's redesign. He knocked down a wall separating the tiny kitchen and living room, creating a loftlike area. Though most of the demolition was clear-cut, Brett ran into a few challenges. Halfway through the renovation, he discovered that 50 square feet of the >

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE LABOR OF LOVE



A SINGLE WALL of green tile adds a shot of color to the all-white bath. To keep a lot of natural light without sacrificing privacy, Brett replaced the shower's rotted window with a higher, shorter one. **THE ZAMORES' SLEEK NEW KITCHEN** complements their bungalow's loftlike feel. A breakfast bar rises above counter height to hide the sink and prep area from the open living/dining room.



original pine floor was rotted out. "We looked everywhere for wood to replace it with, but you can't find old-growth pine anymore," he says. His dilemma was soon resolved when he started tearing down the kitchen walls and discovered the answer right in front of him. "The wood we were ripping out was the same wood that was used as clapboard, so we took it out and used it on the floor," he says.

Storage was another issue. Strangely, the home's closets were only 18 inches deep. "You couldn't get anything inside them," Brett says. "Our hangers would have been at an angle to accommodate our clothes." By reconfiguring the placement of closets, Brett freed up space for more storage. He moved a bedroom closet to allow for a kitchen pantry. (See plans, page 36.) He and René also converted a backyard shed into a laundry room so they could enlarge the kitchen where the washer and dryer used to be. "You have to be really smart with small spaces to maximize every square inch," he says.

The couple considered the kitchen their most important room. "We were fighting a tough budget since we were putting a wedding together, so we tried to remove the idea of customization," Brett says. "Everything was off the shelf—the cabinets, countertops, and closet storage." By saving money there, Brett and René could spend more on appliances and plumbing fixtures. "Electrical and plumbing are the bones of a house," he says. "It's worth it to spend more money to be sure they're done right." Now, the kitchen is the Zamores' favorite room. "Whenever we have people over, we congregate there. You have a good view of the rest of the house," Brett says.

He and René both held up their ends of the bargain. After tying the knot, they were able to cross the threshold into a wonderfully renovated cottage. >

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE LABOR OF LOVE



"WE CONVERTED A SHED in our backyard into our laundry room," Brett says. "That freed up one whole end of our kitchen." New shingles on the roof and a fresh coat of paint give the structure an updated look.

Neighborhood Alert!

Houston Heights, Texas

Just 10 minutes northwest of downtown Houston, historic Houston Heights is a revitalized neighborhood within walking distance of schools, parks, family-owned restaurants, and antiques stores. "The neighborhood has been here for eons, but a new generation of young adults is moving into the community," says René Zamore (left). Fixer-uppers start out around \$175,000, while renovated cottages go anywhere from \$325,000 to \$500,000.

The neighborhood association in Houston Heights presented the Zamores with a community improvement award for Best Residential Restoration in 2006. "As the cost of land increases, you see a lot of people ripping down beautiful old homes just for the lot," Brett says. "It's really important to us to restore character, to bring life back."

"You have to be really smart with small spaces to maximize every square inch"

Take it from Brett:

Modernize a cottage without compromising its cozy charm

■ **Establish continuity using a single color.** "Instead of painting the siding, trim, and windows all a different color, we painted it all white. For the trim and details, we went with a glossy finish," Brett says. The only part of the home's exterior that is not white is the front porch. The porch walls and ceiling are painted a soft green for contrast, and the floor is painted gray.

■ **Add interest to a conventional detail.** In lieu of a traditional privacy fence, Brett built a "cattle fence" by running 1- by 6-foot boards horizontally. "I wanted to continue the linear movement of the clapboard siding into the fence," he explains.

■ **Make simple changes.** Originally, the driveway's two concrete strips were surrounded by dirt and grass, which left a muddy mess when it rained. Brett substituted crushed limestone and gravel for a clean appearance. "The gravel makes the driveway much more functional," he says.

