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PHOTOS: Linsain Barbour

AT HOME ON THE RANCH

A family who decided to ditch their old celebrity postcode in favour of a simpler life on a Portland ranch tell writer and stylist Rohini Wahí why it was one of the best decisions they've ever made.

Looking at this bright and airy, beautifully conceived and gloriously furnished family home, it is hard to believe that it hasn't always appeared this way. However, when Kelly (a former real estate agent) and Alexis Zaboudanis (a property developer) first took on this project their home was nothing more than a run-down split-level ranch with a grim battleship-grey exterior and an oddly narrow front door.

Kelly and Alexis moved from the infamous Los Angeles district of Pacific Palisades, a place littered with celebrity postcodes, in search of a change of lifestyle and a place with morals and values which matched their own in which to raise their children. So, abandoning the world of Aaron Spellings and Britney Spears, the hopeful pair flew north to Portland Oregon to set up shop.

However, over five rain-filled days of exploration of the Portland heartland they found themselves exhausted and disappointed. They had slogged through what felt like every traditional family home on the Portland market yet couldn't help missing the open-plan spaces of their Mid-Century California ranch. Though charmed by Portland's historic bungalows they felt that the floor plans weren't conducive to what they were used to in terms of family living.

Kelly and Alexis took stock of their real objectives: slowing their lives down, finding some peace and quiet and giving their four-year-old Jack and two-year-old Peter room to grow. They wanted what they had in L.A., but without the dead-end values they'd fled.

Serendipitously the pair stumbled across Bridlemile, a



peaceful community in southwest Portland. Bridlemie was a neighbourhood tucked into the panoramic west hills and scattered with mid-century ranch houses, Old Portland-style homes, craftsmen's bungalows, luxury condominiums and town houses on serene streets. Exactly the existence they were in search of!

Within the development they found a rambling 1959 split-level that actually held some promise. The living space centred around a large open room located on the main floor. It boasted a spacious upper-level master suite, a light-filled basement with three bedrooms and maybe most appealingly, a sprawling potential play-room where Jack and Peter could spread out.

Furthermore, the 14,000-square-foot property was about triple the size of the standard inner-city estate. There was a park-sized backyard for the boys to play in, and also a broad, sunny,

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The living area merges the indoors and outdoors perfectly, by incorporating the use of natural materials throughout the furniture and playing with colour and scale on the live-edge accessories. This room is a well-balanced sense of space.

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Jessica's first response to the home was a mixture of horror and dismay. 'It had all these small vinyl windows. The kitchen was super-cramped. Inside, everything was mauve!'



south-facing deck where Kelly and Alexis could relax.

Upon returning to LA, Kelly set about researching Portland-based interior designers and once again serendipitously stumbled across Jessica Helgerson whose online portfolio appealed to the Zahoodanis' contemporary laid back style. Kelly and Jessica began corresponding - emailing each other inspirational clippings from magazines and finally arranged to meet at the property.

Jessica's first response to the home was a mixture of horror and dismay. Helgerson recalls: 'It had all these small vinyl windows. The kitchen was super-cramped. Inside, everything was mauve!'

Fortunately everyone concurred on what needed to be fixed. The two biggest problems were the galley kitchen, which was poorly situated and enclosed by an interior wall which cut off the main living area both from light and views of the front garden -





interior designer Jessica has created a great energy in the home, allowing it to be functional and aesthetic at once. This is shown off to its best in the new bathroom where she has set a gold marble sink on a vanity with a dark, possibly black, finish.

Throughout the home, dark browns, greys and black are juxtaposed against pale tints, creating a feeling of energy and contrast.

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and the master suite with a narrow, elongated bedroom and what Kelly remembers as a 'leery, disgusting bathroom with a tan, rubber floor.'

Helgeson suggested transforming one end of the unnecessarily long master bedroom into a luxurious master bathroom and then downgrading the former bathroom into a walk-in closet. The kitchen could be flipped at a 45 degree angle so that it would hug the adjacent (west) exterior wall of the house and flow directly into the great room. Consequently, the home's front (north) wall would open up, allowing Helgeson's team to install windows there that would let in more light and look out onto a new deck.

Kelly and Alexis were overjoyed with the proposed changes – seeing their future home come together before their eyes. Jessica also suggested tearing down the faux-Colonial painted-wood fireplace in the living room so that the home's original minimalist brick hearth would be exposed, wrapping the flimsy hollow-core interior doors for solid wood ones and replacing the retro clamshell window and door trims with a more subdued, rectilinear design.

Then the fun part began as Jessica Helgeson and her style team moved in. 'I like a high-contrast space,' states interior designer Jessica, who chose white paint and ebony-stained floors for the main portion of the Zahoodanis' residence. 'People tend to go for beige, thinking it's light and safe. It's much more vibrant to have dark and light, next to each other.'

Hence throughout the home, dark browns, greys, and black are juxtaposed against pale tints, creating a feeling of energy and contrast. In the powder room, painted black ceilings make the space feel more expansive (as a rule, dark colours appear to recede from view), while bold patterned wallpaper adds interest. Finally, in our favourite part of the house, slate-grey paint transforms a stair landing into a focal point, and also throws the geometric pattern of a white painted banister into sharp relief.

Jessica and her team furnished every room with eccentric

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desirables. The living room is home to vintage Danish armchairs and a coffee table made by Jessica's husband, architect Yianni Doulis, from a slab of locally salvaged Portland maple. Giant French glass vases rest on the floor and antique Portuguese cel traps hang over the fireplace. The kitchen has been designed with quality in mind, with a bench top made in white carrera marble, showcasing white murano glass pendants designed by Michele de Lucchi.

Needless to say the Zaboudanis' are now very content. They have picnics on Thursdays with their new neighbours in the summertime and Helgerson, who has become firm friends of the Zaboudanis clan, often re-visits her handiwork. Thankfully there have been no celebrity spottings! ●

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