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Dwelling: Remodel in the Round

A basic tract house gets a stunning makeover. By Joan Waters

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Photography by Dave Adams

Whether he's designing a new house or a remodel, Sacramento architect Michael Malinowski likes to give his clients a range of possibilities. To that end, sometimes he'll include a "throwaway" design in his mix—a concept he is perhaps most excited about but doesn't really expect to make the final cut. That's what he thought would happen to the circular living room idea he came up with for a client remodeling a tract home in Natomas. "I thought he would be mildly amused and then return to the more standard rectilinear designs," Malinowski says. "But he went at it like, 'Oh, man, that's it!' He didn't blink twice."

Malinowski describes the homeowner as a man people love to listen to; he envisioned the "rotunda," as the living room is called, as a space where they could all crowd around and soak up his stories "about everything and everyone." "He's just an amazing guy and so much fun to be with," Malinowski says. "This whole project was like an adventure to him."

While the remodel didn't require a complete teardown, Malinowski says there's probably not a single space in the two-story home that wasn't "profoundly affected" by the yearlong makeover. The grand new version of what was once a tract house is just less than 7,300 square feet and has a super-sized corridor leading from the front entry to the rotunda, a sprawling kitchen indoors and another outside, plenty of strolling room for hundreds of party guests, and art everywhere. A lifelong collector, the homeowner says a great joy of the project was seeing his paintings, sculptures, ceramics and art glass come out of storage and adding color, humor and humanity to every room—even the kitchen. "I think if you really, really like something, you shouldn't be restricted about where you want to put it," he says. What's his favorite piece? He thinks maybe he hasn't found it yet. "I discovered something a long time ago: Nice things don't have to be expensive. I buy what I like and what I can afford." So, yes, he's still on the hunt.

Sacramento interior designer Kari Miner says her client's aesthetic strongly influenced choices of wood, metal, stone and furnishings. "He was very, very involved in the process, and, as much as I chose all the surface materials and was on the job every day, he really had a clear vision about all of it." Malinowski vividly remembers intense one-hour project meetings characterized by whirlwind tours of the rooms and much enthusiastic arm waving. The meetings were over when the homeowner happily buzzed off to his next adventure.

"It's great fun for an architect when someone's pushing the envelope, and that was his way," Malinowski says. "He pushed the gas pedal to the floor, hard, all the way through."



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