



"I did not have any specific vision for this room," says Rita. "I just did what pleased me. I am very happy with the result—it is comfortable and friendly."

# Coming Home

Returning to her hometown after four decades, a woman purchases the house she admired as a young girl and gives it a complete makeover

BY REBECCA J. RAZO

**T**HE HAND-SCRIBBLED SIGN POSTED AMONG WEEDS AND overgrowth read “for sale by owner.” The dilapidated condition of the small home in the sleepy farm town of Woodlake, California, would have sent anyone else running from the property screaming. Not Rita Razo.

For one, it’s not in Rita’s character to shy away from a challenge. Second, this was the home she had walked past and admired everyday as a young girl. “I always wondered who lived there,” she says. “It was very secluded with trees and bushes. I never dreamed that one day I would own it!”

Rita and her husband Jesse were looking for a retirement property when, while visiting family, they saw the house. The Razos liked the privacy of the one-acre lot and the fruit trees on the property—traits their suburban Los Angeles home lacked. Still, the home left a lot to be desired.

“The original condition of the house can be called a true disaster,” Rita admits. “We never really looked at the inside as well as we should have!”

The Razos purchased the home and began formulating renovation plans when Jesse became ill and, tragically, died within months. The project subsequently became Rita’s therapy. “I felt that my husband had brought me home after 45 years. I saw this as his last gift to me. With the help of family, I was able to start the process, which kept me sane,” she says.

(Above right) Between the dirty white walls, faded brown trim and neglected hardwood floors, the original condition of the home’s interior left much to be desired.

(Below right) The dining room started coming together with its first coat of paint. The antique dry sink, a gift from Rita’s husband, is the focal point of the room.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF RITA RAZO

## room ix

(Opposite)

**1.** A hinged door on the window seat covers a storage area where Rita hides “stuff I want to get out of sight for awhile. I also use the seat in the winter as a place to stand my feather trees.”

**2-3.** Every Thanksgiving, Rita sets the table using her exquisite gold-trimmed Blue Willow china, which she stores in the cupboard of the antique dry sink. “My husband used the dry sink’s pull-out cutting board to carve the turkey,” she says.

**4.** “I collect anything that is Blue Willow,” says Rita. Here, four Blue Willow platters look striking against the yellow wall. A trio of pitchers sits atop an antique Danish oak side-serving table that the Razos purchased for \$50 at a swap meet years ago.

*“I call my style ‘Discarded American Country,’ since I have found a lot of great pieces while dumpster diving”*

One of the first rooms Rita tackled was the dining room, which had decades-old soiled shag carpet. She removed the carpet to find hardwood floors coated in brown paint. Rita’s son went to work refinishing the floor almost entirely by hand. “The paint was so thick that an electric commercial sander could not get down to the wood,” she says.

A favorite feature of the dining room is the bay window, but the original wavy-glass was not conducive to the cold country nights. Rita installed more energy efficient windows, and painted the room’s bland white walls and dull brown trim in pale yellow and antique white. She then added lace curtains and covered the window seat with vintage pillows that she found at garage sales. “I decided not to make a cushion for the seat—*everyone* has a cushion,” she says.

Rita was also unhappy with the dining room’s original light fixture. It was, in her words, “a tacky gold. I hated it, but all my visitors would comment on how beautiful it was. I decided to paint it with the same white paint I had for the trim, then I sanded it to give it that well-worn look. I loved the effect, so I kept it.”

Completing the room’s look are a traditional oak dining set and Rita’s favorite piece of furniture, an antique dry sink, which showcases her cherished vintage Doulton Blue Willow china.

“I started collecting Blue Willow in my early years of marriage. I loved the pattern, so when I saw it in a Sears catalog, I ordered my first set—a service for eight, including a covered casserole dish, and sugar and creamer for \$40.”

Though the renovation was exhausting, Rita is pleased with the outcome. She now spends her time searching for treasures that fit in with her home’s décor. “I call my style ‘Discarded American Country,’ since I have found a lot of great pieces while dumpster diving.”

For those wanting to embark on a similar endeavor, Rita offers the following advice: “Be ready, be brave and be strong. It was difficult but very rewarding. I would not have it any other way.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK TANNER

STYLED BY HILLARY BLACK AND REBECCA RAZO

## Country Dining

Want to infuse your dining room with a bit of romantic country charm? Try these resources:

- **Paint:** Sherwin Williams  
Butter Up (6681) or Glisten Yellow (6912)  
Ibis White (7000) or Snowbound (7004)  
Visit [sherwin-williams.com](http://sherwin-williams.com)
- **Blue Willow China:** Visit [bluewillowchina.com](http://bluewillowchina.com)
- **Tablecloth:** Crochet tablecloth in beige  
Visit [thetableclothshop.com](http://thetableclothshop.com)
- **Chandelier:** Tuscan Olde Pendant Chandelier  
Visit [target.com](http://target.com)
- **Cupboard:** Hunt Country Furniture Small Sideboard  
Visit [huntcountryfurniture.com](http://huntcountryfurniture.com)
- **Pillows:** French Market Collection Floral Pillow  
Visit [laylagrayce.com](http://laylagrayce.com)

