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TUNNEL VISION

Addition by subtraction best describes how architect Jill Stoner transformed a long, dark, narrow apartment into an airy, light-filled space

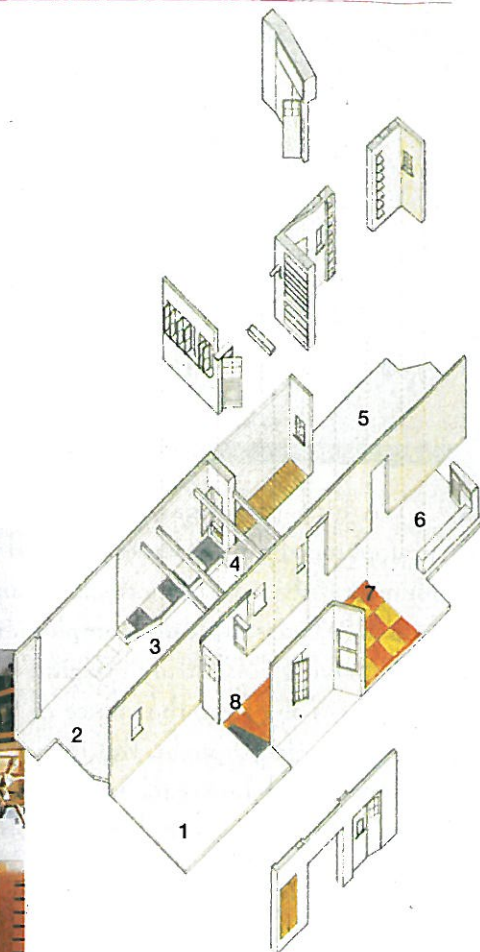
BY TESSA SOUTER

When Jill Lahn Stoner first moved into her San Francisco condominium in a two-story Edwardian house, her challenge was to open it up. Down the middle ran a tunnel-like corridor with doors on either side leading to rooms that were dark and depressing. Only two rooms had natural light: the sitting room and a bedroom that overlooked a pretty garden at the back of the house.

Stoner's solution was to tear down walls and add interior windows to spread the light around. "Our work is always much more about taking away than putting in," says Stoner of Lahn Architects. "That's probably why our projects are affordable." To counteract the bowling alley look in the corridor she took down part of the corridor wall and replaced it with a large opening, creating a guest alcove in place of a tiny, dark bedroom. Toward the rear of the house, the original bathroom was ripped out and the wall torn down to produce an open dining area just across from the kitchen. (A new bath was built in what used to be the laundry.)

The kitchen now replaces the hall as the focal point of the space. Previously dark and dingy with one small, viewless window, it now has six interior windows opening to the sitting room, so it shares the natural light. Stoner removed the entire wall that divided the kitchen and the hall to open the kitchen to the new dining area. "It's more sociable now," she says of the fact that she can chat with people in the hall, dining area, and sitting room while cooking or cleaning up.

"The project was also about uncovering the city," says Stoner, who sought to give her home an urban feeling. The hall was conceived as "an urban streetscape." A niche in the hall is reminiscent of those found in Venetian exterior walls. Almost all the interior doors have frosted mullioned windows. Elsewhere, certain areas of the floor have been raised "to cre-



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|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Bedroom | 5. Bedroom |
| 2. Living/sitting room | 6. Front hall |
| 3. Kitchen | 7. Study/guest room |
| 4. Bathroom | 8. Dining area |

Above: Axonometric drawing shows added and subtracted elements. Above left: Looking from the hall into the kitchen. Left: Interior windows allow natural light to reach the kitchen.

ate the effect of an outside terrace" in the kitchen and

"to give the feeling of going somewhere different" (and, more mundanely, to hide the pipework in the bathroom).

Stoner allowed much of the detailing to evolve as the work progressed. When a hole above the kitchen stove appeared during construction, she turned it into an interior window whose ledge is a handy extra shelf. The lath exposed during construction inspired the design of louvered cupboard doors. The oversize floor tiles are the result of "an experiment that worked" (they are made from painted and stained hardwood squares).

"It was *all* one big experiment," says Stoner, extolling the virtue of being one's own client. ■