

365 61st Street, Oakland

When I began looking at houses in 1997, I immediately focused on Rockridge. My agent directed me to listings all over North Oakland and Berkeley, but I kept coming back to the block where I ended up. I had the idea that, at that location, there could be days or entire weekends when I wouldn't ever get in my car—I'd stroll along tree-lined streets to bistros and boutiques, dry cleaning and movies. I'd go for runs in the neighborhood and bike in the hills just up Claremont Avenue from the front door. This turned out to be completely true.

First, I walked with my dog up and down College Avenue or along the fire trails above the Claremont. I popped into Green Bean coffee shop for veggie bagels and the owners and patrons became some of my close friends. Many friends, family members and neighbors gathered for barbecues, parties and open studios—when I covered my walls with photos produced in my upstairs darkroom. Then, along came the husband (after we had our first dinner date at Nan Yang). I couldn't possibly count the number of meals we've since shared at Cactus or Red Sea. Then, along came the daughter and we picked up coffee (to counter sleepless nights) along the stroll to Rockridge Kids, FROG park or the Sunday farmers market.

Many of the neighbors had been here for decades by 1998. They told me stories of other families who'd lived in #365, and of the history of the neighborhood—like that the circle park on the other side of Colby St. used to be a pond where cows gathered to drink water. In ten years, many other young families have moved onto the block, which at times seemed filled to the brim with toddlers and Labradors. Neighbors gather for an annual summer block party, with music and a potluck lunch.

A cracked shower pan prompted me to tear out and replace the downstairs bathroom as soon as I moved in. It was the first and last time I played general contractor, but it did give me the itch to keep remodeling. I took a few years get to know the house and to locate exactly the right contractor and architect. Together, the three of us devised a master plan to update and modernize the house. Then we tackled one room or project at a time over a span of six years. Ever-tolerant of my design ideas and constant input, many of the local craftspeople who worked on these projects became close friends. The dog slipped into a deep depression when the last workers packed up after the completion of the final project (the upstairs bathroom). It was definitely a labor of love; I'd stay forever if not for a husband eager to return to Southern California.

*--JP Andrews
owner/seller (with husband Ken Luke)*

**All improvements were done with permits.*