A front-door-to-labyrinth sight line would’ve been impossible to get with the home’s original dining room and kitchen in place. Removing interior walls permitted the living room to open to the kitchen and the dining room, which overlooks a newly installed labyrinth. The floor-to-ceiling Fleetwood sliding doors are from Dallas Glass in Salem, Ore. Robert Ferré, the owner of Labyrinth Enterprises LLC in St. Louis, used putty knives to “paint” a pulverized granite-plastic-resin mix into a Santa Rosa labyrinth pattern atop a concrete base.
Professor-turned-massage-therapist Angus Vail remakes his 1950 ranch-style home in Salem, Ore., into a live-work utopia with a massage studio-office addition and a lawn-replacing labyrinth.
PITY THE POOR PILGRIMS WHO HAVE to trek all the way to Chartres Cathedral in France to walk its iconic labyrinth, a meditative practice dating back to antiquity. In Salem, Ore., Angus Vail merely steps outside to have a similarly serene experience, thanks to the backyard labyrinth that he recently installed. It serves as the centerpiece of his redesigned home and newly built massage studio, which has shrunk down this massage therapist’s commuting time to seconds. The labyrinth also epitomizes the spaciousness, beauty and Zenlike tranquility that he and his remodeling squad infused into this mid-century-style dwelling.

“It's called a Santa Rosa labyrinth, and it's similar to the one at Chartres,” says Vail. “There are all sorts of philosophical underpinnings—ways to walk them and ways to achieve things with walking them—but rebirth is a big part of it. When you walk it, you go in as one kind of person, experience being centered, and then you come out into the world.”

Befitting a labyrinth owner, Vail knows all about new beginnings. Originally from Bedford, N.Y. (home of über-decorator Martha Stewart), he moved to Oregon a decade ago to become a sociology professor at a university. An expert on the intersection of art and culture, Vail’s artistic passions visibly converge within his home in the form of serene Buddhist statues.

**MAIN LEVEL**

**BEFORE (BELOW) AND AFTER (RIGHT)**

Vail found the home’s original dining room (left) claustrophobic. The new dining room (opposite) is open to the new kitchen and gives dinner guests a floor-to-ceiling view of Portland landscape architect Laura Canfield’s handiwork.
“If I could live in a house that was all chrome and glass, I would,” says Vail about his favorite materials. “I like the horizontal lines in this light fixture that Petra found, and also that I can raise it or lower it depending on what I’m doing at the table.” The polished-nickel pendant is from WAC Lighting’s Counter Balance Collection. Two 19th century fly catchers from Madison Park in Portland accent succulents in glass and zinc containers. His parents bought the Oriental rug during a tour of the Soviet Union.
The original kitchen and dining room were small with a pass-through beneath the kitchen’s upper cabinets between the two rooms,” says Vail. “I didn’t realize how much of a cave the old house was until walls between the living room, kitchen and dining room were removed and the house was opened up.” Dennis Bowen of Lemons Millwork in Albany, Ore., fabricated the Nevamar cabinets. Restoration Creek Inc. in Salem, Ore., laid new flooring in the kitchen to match the 60-year-old floor in the living room.
framed patterns of tattoos and richly colorful opera posters. Even this opera lover's two rambunctious kittens sport the Wagnerian names Wotan and Erda.

After receiving tenure, Vail seemed destined to spend the rest of his life in academia. He credits a subsequent sabbatical with giving him sufficient distance from his usual duties to rethink his life and career. “It became clear to me that the kinds of headaches that go along with an academic job weren’t the headaches that I was interested in having for the rest of my life,” he says. “I started thinking, What did I want my life to be about? I realized that I wanted it to be about connection, groundedness and simplicity.”

Vail hit upon his next career while lying on a massage table and receiving the worst rubdown of his life. “As I was getting this horrible massage, what flashed through my mind was, If this guy can make a living at this, I can do this for a living. At first it wasn’t a serious plan, but as I continued to suffer on the table, I thought, Wait a minute: What’s massage therapy about? It’s about connection, groundedness and simplicity—all the things that I really want my life to be about.”

The idea took hold, and Vail enrolled in the Oregon School of Massage. Trained in Swedish, deep-tissue, reiki, shiatsu and craniosacral massage, Vail now operates his own massage-therapy practice, Celestial Dance, dedicated to helping over-
worked professionals escape the stresses of daily life.

He soon realized that his home—a 60-year-old ranch-style house in a charming neighborhood of older homes and mature trees—would require serious retooling to accommodate his new livelihood. For starters, the house lacked a dedicated workspace with its own entrance that could serve as his massage studio. “I’d do my intake and exit interviews in the dining room and do the massage in the study,” says Vail. “I was always stressing about whether dirty dishes were in the sink since the space was so little, and it also got to be stressful to have clients—who I liked, but who were still clients—coming into my house and going into my study.”

Vail also wanted to fix some of the home’s drawbacks. “The kitchen was completely claustrophobic,” he says. “Cabinets that hung a little too low blocked all the counter space, and the cabinets weren’t deep enough to be functional. And I had this nice two-door refrigerator, but it was too big for the space. I had to do this weird little step to the side and then step around it to get around the door.” The adjacent dining room was also cramped and walled off from the rest of the house.

Having walked his first labyrinth while taking a massage class at Breitenbush Hot Springs, Vail wanted to incorporate a labyrinth into the remodel. Other items on his must-do list included upgrading the windows, and rethinking the landscaping and overall look of the house.

Fortunately, Vail knew where to turn for remodeling help, thanks to an earlier makeover that included turning his formerly snug main bathroom into what Vail now proudly dubs his Bathing Cave. The enlarged space features an ample new soaking tub, multiple shower heads and glimmering red tile made of recycled glass. Vail was thrilled with the outcome and reconstituted much the same group for this latest effort. They included Portland architect and friend Tim Mitchell; contractor Robert Kraft, the principal of the design-build firm Kraft Custom Construction in Salem; and interior designer Petra Geiling of Petra Geiling Interior Design in Salem.

Mitchell played an advisory role this time around. At his suggestion, Vail enlisted Jason Swift, the principal of SWIFT Architecture LLC in Portland, as project architect, with Kraft, Geiling and land-
“We took out a closet in the bedroom that I use as a study, and added that space to the tiny bathroom that was original to the house to create what I call my Bathing Cave,” says Vail.

“Now I can get three different bathing experiences: I can soak in a two-foot-deep tub; I can take a regular shower under three different heads; or I can stand under my rainforest showerhead.” He first saw the vibrant red Oceanside Glasstiles one-inch-square mosaic tile in an ad in Dwell.
the height-adjustable, five-light pendant. From The Lighting Gallery (2425 25th St. SE, 503-364-2715 or go to lightupsalem.com) in Salem, Ore. “I knew this WAC Lighting fixture would be perfect in Angus’ dining room,” says interior designer Petra Geiling. “It makes a contemporary design statement, yet it has a low and unobtrusive profile, which allows guests to see past the fixture and through the large glass doors. Also, I like that it’s appropriately scaled for his long dining table, and that Angus can raise and lower the light if he needs to.” The 5-Light Counter Balance Island Light (model AP-5RE), from WAC Lighting’s Counter Balance Collection, is 36 inches long and 72 inches high, when fully extended. The five white-glass cylinders hold 20-watt bulbs, which Vail’s design team put on a dimmer switch to make it touch-of-a-button simple for Vail to change the ambience in the dining and entertaining space.

the cut-and-etched-aluminum “book.”

From his mother. “It has a wonderful sense of movement and flow to it,” says Vail of the 16-by-14-inch sculpture called Light, which sculptor-astronomer-urban planner-poet-and-novelist Michael Burke did in 2001. “My mother saw Burke’s work and met him and bought this piece. She used to display it on top of the white granite coffee table that I now have in my living room. I like its abstract shapes and that the carvings appear to be light waves. Burke does small sculptures like this one and ones as tall as 20 feet.” The Kuros Gallery (23 E. 73rd St., 212-288-5999) in New York City represents the artist.

the candy-apple red glass tile.

From Oceanside Glasstile (2293 Cosmos Ct., 760-929-4000 or go to glasstile.com) in Carlsbad, Calif. “What’s it say that I went with red tile in the bathroom?” asks Vail. “That I’m not afraid of color, that’s what it says. But I didn’t want to use a red tile that had too uniform a color. I like that the color of each of these tiles is unique—from yellow-red to red-red—which, when seen together, gives the tiles a real depth. They live; they breathe. I think the red tile gives the bathroom drama, but the space is soothing to be in, too.”
scape architect Laura Canfield, the principal of Laura Canfield Garden Design, also serving as key members of Vail's remodeling team. "And you've always got to thank the client, because if the client doesn't have vision and doesn't want to invest in creating the space and step out a little bit, you don't get to do jobs like this," says Kraft. "It all goes back to this team approach. Angus has this vision, Petra helps him put that vision into particular finishes, Jason helps him put it into the architectural plans and engineering, we all help bring the ideas to life, and Laura makes a serene outside and creates that indoor-outdoor connection—that's how we achieve what we set out to do."

Vail loved their ideas. "I hired good people to do their thing, and I got out of the way," he says. "They were smart in figuring out what I needed. The original scope of my imagination was very limited compared to what I ended up getting."

Construction began in May 2010 and ended four months later without a hitch. During that period, with Vail decamped to a nearby rental house, Kraft and his crew bumped out the back of his home 10 feet to create an expansive new dining area. In place of a typical exterior wall, they installed floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors that bathe the interiors in natural light and let Vail and his dinner guests enjoy the beauty of his revamped backyard. Knotty-cedar siding on the walls near the sliding doors serve as a visual transition between indoors and out.

With Vail's dining room shifted to the new bump-out, the kitchen could then expand into the space the dining room previously occupied. No longer boxed in by internal walls and ill-conceived cabinetry, the unencumbered kitchen enjoys sightlines that extend from the backyard to the front. "The design was basically to open it up," says Swift, who kept the kitchen free of upper cabinetry that would've impinged on the room's newfound spacious-

Guests—and clients—used to climb a staircase from the driveway (left) to the front door. Now visitors climb new concrete steps at the property's edge and reach a courtyardlike space (above) that Canfield designed as a private breakfast terrace. Guests cross architectural slabs to get to the new reed-glass-paned red front door; clients walk down a gravel path around the house and over the labyrinth to the massage studio.
“This labyrinth is similar to the one at Chartres,” says Vail. “When you walk it, you go in as one kind of person, experience being centered, and then you come out into the world.”

More than a decorative flourish, the labyrinth serves as the linchpin of the project. “This whole project is about journeys,” says Swift. “There’s the actual journey—the meditation—that you take when you walk the labyrinth. There’s the journey from the front of the house to the back that Angus’ clients make to receive his massage therapy. It all intertwines. The labyrinth is the piece that holds the relationship of the labyrinth to the home and to the massage studio, so they could function together. In a lot of ways, the labyrinth is the piece that holds the entire project together.”
“This is the greatest massage table in the world,” says Vail of his state-of-the-art Comfort Craft massage table that tilts, raises and lowers via foot controls. “I wanted this studio to say, ‘When you come here, this space is yours and you have my full attention.’” A Chilean Potato Vine, a prolific flowerer with yellow-centered purple-blue blooms and a subtle fragrance is being espaliered up the fence and will soon give Vail’s clients a backdrop of color from spring to October.