



**PROBLEM:** A bland fireplace front with no useful storage or display space. "The challenge was to work around the existing vent to create a new fireplace and wall," architect Stephen Phillips says.

**SOLUTION:** Phillips ripped out the old plaster and the tiles around the fireplace and clad the half-wall and vent in a rich cherry wood. He replaced the wood-burning fireplace with a gas model and added a new surround in brushed stainless steel. Thin strips of aluminum add a geometric pattern.

But the showstopper is the decorative privacy screen Phillips designed to fill the void between the top of the half-wall and the upper floor. It's a grid of 12 sandblasted-glass panels that appear to float above the living room. The screen's shelves are cherry to match the wall and have maple strips underneath to complement a new maple staircase. The glass panels are held together by metal brackets, originally designed to hold glass shower doors. Phillips sums up the design as "a simple gesture that turned out to be an inexpensive solution for a difficult spot."



## Art exhibit

When Bill Longwell and Shirley Ma asked architect Stephen Phillips to do something about their awkwardly designed fireplace and staircase, they never expected the result would be so spectacular. Their townhouse in Alameda, California, featured a fireplace tucked under a half-wall on the living room side of the staircase. The fireplace vent formed part of the staircase wall and couldn't be removed.

Thanks to some imaginative restructuring, it's now a display wall showcasing the couple's collection of African art. A touch-latch panel to the right of the fireplace hides a new entertainment center. —ANN BERTELSEN

**DESIGN:** Stephen Phillips Architecture (SPARCHS), Los Angeles (626/353-9464) and San Francisco (415/449-3461) ★

A new glass railing, cherry paneling, metal accents, and contemporary lighting turn the partition into an elegant multitasker.