

# california

HOME+DESIGN

## MIX IT UP

THE NEW  
ECLECTIC  
ELEGANCE

A 1908 Georgian  
in Pacific Heights  
gets a modern  
makeover, p. 122

NICASIO  
BUILDING THE  
JAPANESE RANCH

MILL VALLEY  
COTTAGE STYLE  
REINVENTED

LOS ANGELES  
RETRO GLAMOUR,  
DOMESTIC BLISS

# THE EDEN PROJECT

ARCHITECT KEN LINSTEADT HELPED A WORLDLY COUPLE  
REALIZE THEIR VISION OF PARADISE IN THE SUBURBS.  
BY DEBORAH BISHOP PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK DARLEY STYLING BY GARY SPAIN/ARTIST UNTIED



When the owners of this newly expanded domicile first set eyes on the property some 17 years ago, they didn't fall in love with the house—a dark, 1,100-square-foot ramshackle affair with a kitchen that once contained a chicken coop. And although the steeply sloping site was overgrown with thickets of blackberry bushes amid rotting walls, the two passionate gardeners could envision a riotous English cottage-style garden filled with fruit trees, vegetables and flowers. So they opted to share the cramped quarters with their two children (now 16 and 19) and assorted cats and dogs in exchange for their personal Arcadia, until a stock-market windfall provided the means to create a house as gracious as the grounds.

“We love Mill Valley,” says the male half of the couple (who wish to remain anonymous), a photographer who grew up in a Tudor farmhouse in Hampshire, England. “We’d lived in Europe, the Upper West Side of Manhattan and upstate New York, and we wanted somewhere rural but close to an airport.” His wife, a former opera singer

The gallery steps end at a lookout, where Paola Lenti's Linea chaise is suggestive of a body in repose. From here, one may turn left onto the lower terrace, or take a right into the living room.

and teacher of cultural studies, adds, “We cringe at suburban! This place has authenticity—Jack Kerouac's house was down the road. Living on our dirt lane on the

side of a mountain, we feel very far away, but we can walk straight into town or head to open space—Mount Tam, Stinson Beach. It's all about the outdoors.”

Given their passion for place, it was fitting that their architect of choice was a fellow Mill Valley denizen. Ken Linsteadt, who did time with Philip Johnson and SOM, deftly doubled the size of the home while, in the words of Alexander Pope, retaining the “genius of the place.” “This is a vernacular Mill Valley house, so it was not suited to a radical architectural statement,” says Linsteadt, who characterizes his style as romantic modern. “I wanted to



In order to connect the house with the garden, which used to feel quite separate due to the steepness of the slope, the landscape architects created a series of terraces that lead gradually down from the house.



create a separate pavilion for the master suite and living room, but it had to work with the existing structure.” The new building is joined to the original by an elongated gallery entrance comprised of thin, steel-sash windows. “The buildings feel as though they were pulled apart, allowing light to fill in the voids,” explains Linsteadt.

“I work in a visual medium and deal with complicated spaces,” says the photographer, “so I needed some pure areas without too much distraction. I knew that if Ken gave us some clean, crisp spaces—like the gallery and the plastered staircase that leads to the master bedroom—my wife would provide the color and furniture to make all the rest feel friendly.” The collaboration resulted in a Bloomsbury-esque mélange of iconic pieces, artwork of personal significance (including a painting by the teacher’s great-great-grandfather that hangs over the piano) and materials that add depth and texture, such as a cement floor finished to a rich patina that suggests polished leather.

While the new, lofty spaces embrace the garden and the sunlight, the renovated kitchen, located off the gallery, is more domestic, with a lower, beamed ceiling and lighter materials.

The kitchen table, designed by architect Louis M. Goodman, a family friend, is illuminated by Ingo Maurer’s Zettel’z chandelier. The residents had the dining chairs shipped from Paris.

In the formerly dark and warren-like kitchen, materials such as stainless steel for the counters, bamboo flooring and Calacatta marble create a sense of lightness in the newly expanded room.

The living room is personalized by an artful clutter. When sunlight becomes too intense, the unlined cream mohair drapes are closed to bathe the room in a diffuse glow.

*“This house was not suited to a radical architectural statement.”*



STEFANIE MICHE/DA

The far wall of Douglas fir conceals cabinets and a work area, and the center island of Calacatta marble has a roughened edge—more fitting, agree the residents, to their rustic setting. On the other side of the gallery, the living room offers an array of seating, from a pair of vintage Gio Ponti chairs to a John Pawson-inspired bench that spans the floating fireplace to a wood-lined library niche in the corner. And the whole room benefits from a profusion of natural light, which Linsteadt sought to bring in from three sides. “That quality of light creates natural fill and a very pleasant balance,” says the photographer.

ABOVE: A painting by Lynda Sandhaus hangs in the stairway. ABOVE, RIGHT: Architect Ken Linsteadt in his San Francisco office. RIGHT: A stone spiral surrounding a cherry tree guides the descent to the garden.

After construction, landscape architects Stephen Suzman and Maureen Simmons of San Francisco firm Suzman & Cole assumed the task of reconnecting house and garden. Recalls Suzman, “The series of outdoor rooms, beginning with the upper terrace, are places of calm before the lavishness. We had to impose some structure, both to corral the sheer mass of plant material and to provide a gradual descent.” The low stone spiral, which encircles a cherry tree, winds around into increasingly dense, rose-filled borders that culminate at the lawn and a majestic buckeye tree.

“Stephen formalized the garden without destroying its character,” says the teacher. “This used to be a falling-down cabin with a rambling cottage garden. Now it’s finally an adult house—and the garden relates to it.” Since part of the potager was claimed for the expansion, the garden now produces more fruit than vegetables. On a balmy day in late summer, a hospitably proffered bowl of homemade plum ice cream—rapidly consumed—provided the ultimate testament to the beauty of indoor-outdoor living, Mill Valley style. ■

