



In the living room, plush sofas by Hildebrand and a bench by Bourgeois surround a coffee table by Harbinger. A glass-and-metal chandelier by McEwen seems to crown the room. The rug is from Tony Kitz.

# FULL HOUSE

A couple makes a San Francisco home for their extended clan

by MARY JO BOWLING photography by PAUL DYER

**THE ENTRANCE TO THIS RUSSIAN HILL** building gives few hints as to what lies inside. It's composed of a stucco, terra-cotta-colored wall and a black metal, filigreed gate. Glimpse through, and you see a bit of the lush gardens that tumble down the hill toward the bay. Walk through the gate, and you are seemingly transported to another world, a place that put interior designer Kendall Wilkinson and architect Ken Linsteadt in mind of the Mediterranean.

With the red-tile roof, the brick courtyard and the bubbling fountain, surely architect T. Paterson Ross had that region in mind when he built the 29-unit complex in 1921. One of those units belongs to a couple who wanted to create a space where their large family could gather, and they hired Wilkinson and Linsteadt to make it happen. They couldn't have chosen a more scenic spot to bring everyone together. From the windows of their home, you can see the bay, Alcatraz and Coit Tower. "I had never been inside the building before, and it caught me by surprise," Linsteadt says. "The views are quintessential San Francisco, but the surroundings make you feel like you are somewhere in Tuscany."

The strong Mediterranean flavor might have felt limiting



to some architects, but to Linsteadt it was business as usual. “In our practice, we often work with historic homes, and we are used to taking cues from the old buildings,” he says. That said, the team wanted to rethink the space. Embracing the spectacular views was a no-brainer, but building rules stated that the exterior could not be altered, therefore most windows couldn’t change.

However, the interior walls were fair game. Linsteadt removed the wall between the kitchen and the dining room, allowing the narrow cooking space to become more expansive and giving it an Alcatraz view. Now that the kitchen was on display, Linsteadt and Wilkinson worked together to make it a quiet space that lives comfortably with the dining and living area. Cabinets and drawers are painted the soft gray shade of San Francisco’s fog. Upper cabinets are gone (storage moves to an adjacent pantry) in favor of a broad expanse of marble slab and a room-spanning soffit that hides the range hood. Wilkinson also selected marble countertops, giving them substantial, three-inch edges for presence.

Utility location limited how many walls could be removed in the living room, which is divided between a sitting room and a larger living space. Linsteadt opened the walls between the rooms as much as possible, preserving a small, gas fireplace between them. “If the wall had come down completely, you would have had a very large, very hard room to furnish,” says Wilkinson.



**OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** The dining room is now open to the kitchen, and appointed with a table from Randolph and Hein, chairs by Dakota Jackson and a chandelier by Cliff Hersh.

**OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM:** The terra-cotta-colored building that's surrounded by lush gardens reminded the designer and architect of Italy. **THIS PAGE:** A Plug lamp and a swivel armchair by Kimberly Denman make a nice play to read or enjoy the view in the living room.



"You have to remember that, although these people have their family over often, they have to be comfortable when it's just the two of them. This sitting room is perfect for when they are enjoying their morning coffee together."

In a nod to the building's classic architecture, the team worked hard to make sure that, although practically every surface was touched, the alterations weren't obvious. Wilkinson selected hand-troweled Venetian plaster for the walls to give the space an Old World look. Linsteadt designed plaster walls and ceiling moldings that look like they have always been there, and draw the eye upward. "I like larger windows, but where we couldn't make them bigger, we put a transom-shaped molding above them," he says. "It makes the room seem taller."

In the master suite, the bathroom is the more compact size favored by people in 1921. Linsteadt gave it the expansiveness modern families prefer by separating it from the bedroom with pocket doors. When they are closed, they provide privacy. When open, you can see Coit Tower from the bathtub. "Large bathrooms are nice, but sometimes it can be

a waste of space," the architect says. "This bathroom has all you need, and when the doors are open, it's full of light."

Wilkinson made the freestanding bathtub a focal point by installing a tub filler in the ceiling above it. "When you turn it on, it becomes something like a waterfall. It puts you in mind of a Japanese bathing ritual, where sight and sound are important parts of the preparation," she says. "It's perfect for my client, who loves all things Zen."

Because a number of family members can be staying here on any given weekend, Wilkinson made sure that many of the rooms do double duty. For instance, in the home office she installed a sleeper sofa that's flanked by custom-designed ottomans that fold out to become twin beds. "Everything here has a purpose, and some pieces have more than one," says Wilkinson.

Listening to Wilkinson describe her clients, you get the idea that those beds are used often and the rooms frequently filled with laughter and the sounds of children playing. "They have seven children and several grandchildren," says Wilkinson. "These are people who are very family oriented."

**THIS PAGE:** A room-spanning soffit hides the range hood. **OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT:** This ottoman from BoConcepts folds out into a bed when needed for guests. **TOP RIGHT:** A tub filler positioned above the bathtub makes bathing a spa-like experience. **BOTTOM:** A Lucite desk from Plexi-Craft has a leather-wrapped surface for writing.

