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Features

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LEFT Everything in the Montecito home by Warner Architecture Group is on an industrial and grand dramatic scale. Photograph by Eric Figg

COVER Dominating one corner of the San Francisco living room belonging to Dr. Terry Gross and her husband Scott Gross is an eighteenth century secretaire. The Italian Rococo piece is japanned and decorated with fanciful Chinoiserie landscapes. Displayed on the fall front is a nineteenth century Turkish three-piece coral and ivory writing set. A pair of Chinese terra-cotta parrots that were used as incense burners perch on the candle slides. Accompanying the secretaire is a Rococo Italian fauteuil upholstered in Lee Jofa's Tivoli Antico color Olive with antique embroidery from Ann Getty and Associates.



72

MAGIC ON NOB HILL

A Collector Creates A European Styled Apartment In The Heart Of San Francisco

TEXT BY KENDRA BOUTELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID DUNCAN LIVINGSTON

84

A MASTERPIECE IN MONTECITO

This Contemporary House By The Warner Group Architects Is Dramatic, Grand In Scale And Filled With Light

TEXT BY LESLIE A. WESTBROOK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC FIGGE

92

TRADITIONAL MEETS CONTEMPORARY

This Wilshire Boulevard Penthouse Designed By Karla Champion Features A European Inspired Environment

TEXT BY CHRISTINE ANDERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERHARD PFEIFFER

a masterpiece in Montecito

This Contemporary House By
The Warner Group Architects
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The ceiling of the entryway doubles as a glass floor on the 2nd level to allow for the maximum amount of natural light to illuminate the dramatic entry way. Beyond, the red lacquered elevator provides a splash of color and convenience between floors. Honed 18" x 18" black granite pavers flow seamlessly inside and out to unite the entire first floor.



Modern furnishings and cabinetry throughout the house are, for the most part Italian, in homage to Tom Frisina's Italian roots. The 9' Steinway concert grand piano in the living room is not just for looks; Chris plays classical pieces and Tom's father, David Frisina, was a classical violinist virtuoso and longtime concertmaster for the L.A. Philharmonic. Floor to ceiling pocketing glass walls slide open, inviting indoor/outdoor living, while the slope of the landscaping gives one the feeling of being in a treehouse in the canopy of the large eucalyptus trees that were preserved on site.



f Piet Mondrian, the Dutch artist known for his block compositions and straight forward primary color palette (think black, white, yellow, blue and red), were to visit the striking, contemporary house perched on a Montecito hillside, he might feel right at home. The exterior window and wall patterns of the soaring sculptural building, designed by The Warner Group Architects, as well as the interior palette of black, white, red and gray, chosen by the lady of the house, easily could have been created by the twentieth century Dutch artist—if he had been an architect.

Typical of the design philosophy of The Warner Group Architects, the finished product is dramatic, grand in scale (twelve foot ceilings) and light filled. Windows, sliding pocket glass walls (all Fleetwood), and exterior patios take advantage of peaceful tree top views. A soothing wall fountain made of stacked, tapered flagstone is set in the huge retaining wall at the back of the property. Exterior landscaping, reflecting typical Mediterranean landscapes, includes Italian Cyprus and lemon trees accented by fragrant rosemary.

Beauty doesn't come easy. The lot for the 6,300 square foot three bedroom, four bath house, sat at a steep eighteen degree angle. The building required ninety six trucks of concrete and took three years from start to finish. When Chris and Tom Frisina bought the lot it came with concept drawings by The Warner Group for two different homes. One was contemporary, the other Tuscan. Architect Thiep Cung was delighted when they chose the contemporary drawing. Most of the furnishings and cabinetry are contemporary Italian pieces from sources including DZINE, in San Francisco, B&B Italia by Maxalto, and Design Within Reach, in Santa Barbara, and they complement the architecture.

Bold furniture pieces compliment the modern architectural design of the home; displayed here is The Zanotta, "Speed" cabinet, by Carlo Colombo with red lacquered doors. Pictured above is a lithograph by Alexandra Nechita, titled, Angels Rising.





“Everything in this house is of an industrial scale. It took time and patience to build. The whole house was a puzzle and we made everything fit,” says *homeowner Chris Frisina*, who designed the interiors with the aid of *The Warner Group Architects*.

Deciding upon options—from choosing black granite floors to the selection of the glass ceiling in the foyer—proved both exhilarating and educational for Chris Frisina, whose previous interior design experience included remodels, but not projects of such a grand scale.

“It was a beautiful learning process,” she says, “and I loved working with The Warner Group. It expanded my horizons and views on design. One thing I learned is that the building is evolving while you are building it.” Evolutions included finding a way to incorporate a television into a kitchen wall and adding a fireplace in the upstairs sitting room by “popping out” a wall.

Theme colors for the interior were black, red and white. “First I had to decide where the red was going to go in the kitchen,” says the attractive blue eyed blonde, then she began the grand culinary center with black kitchen cabinetry built in Verona, Italy, and the counter made from white with black veined Carrera marble. The media room has red walls (“with a bit more brown in them”); bathrooms make use of black granite counter tops, shower stalls and bath surrounds. There is even a



Throughout the house, floor to ceiling windows frame treetop views of Eucalyptus opening to ocean and mountain vistas; creating the feeling of a modern day treehouse. Room boundaries are blurred as the eye is drawn outside to boundless space among the treetops, where the observer is at once exposed to nature and kept private by it.



red elevator that proves useful for transporting luggage and other items to the second floor guestrooms and master suite. A design highlight is the glass railing (as opposed to an iron railing) for the staircase that Chris designed with the architectural firm. Also it was her idea to create a round stainless steel chimney. Would she do it again? "Give me ten years!" she says.

The Warner Group, founded in 1966 by Jack Lionel Warner, who still consults, has an excellent reputation for designing elegant homes, ranging from contemporary to traditional, as well as country clubs and high end commercial projects around the world. Things are not always easy on large projects says Cung, as he recalls the building of a multi-million dollar Lake Tahoe home the firm designed and built for a client who insisted it be completed for his fiftieth birthday. The project took twelve months, fifteen architects, two builders and six hundred workers, often working 24/7. "The last truck pulled out at 4:00 pm and the guests began to arrive at 5:00 pm" says the architect.

Current West Coast projects include several 15,000 square foot homes in Santa Barbara; a glass house in Manhattan Beach; a Northern Italian style villa overlooking the Pacific in Laguna Beach; a luxurious forty six unit condominium development in Carmel and country clubs throughout California from Pebble Beach to La Jolla. International projects include a 45,000 square foot home in Kuwait; an Italian villa in Hawaii on fifteen acres; several country clubs and two high rises in Panama and large resorts and estates in Vietnam.

"A great client gives you freedom to do your best work," says Thiep Cung, who first joined the firm in 1995 and became CEO in 2005, adding that, "Creating a great structure is a collaboration between the architect, builder and his client."

While the Frisina's and The Warner Group collaborated on the building, most of the art throughout the house was part of the collection the couple built over the years. There are prints by Calder, Miro, and Picasso. Perhaps a Mondrian would fit right in. ^[1]