

MAGAZINE







SECRETGARDEN

DESIGNER: ERIN MARTIN ARCHITECT: KEN LINSTEADT
TEXT: ZAHID SARDAAR PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW MILLMAN





JIM STAFFORD, THE FORMER PUBLISHER OF PC MAGAZINE and owner of Restoration Timber, a reclaimed-wood purveyor in San Francisco, recently acquired eleven acres with four stucco-clad structures close to Sonoma's town square in California wine country. He couldn't resist the hillside property's 250-year-old live oak trees, including "some that were espaliered by Indians for harvesting acorns," he says. "Once you come up the driveway and enter the courtyard surrounded by wide-canopied native trees, you're in the middle of their secret garden."

The main house was a 5,500-square-foot two-story villa that opened onto a swimming pool terrace. Pyramidal tiled roofs defined each corner, and the axial entryways and square layout recalled Palladio's Villa Rotunda in Vicenza, Italy. To underscore this architectural conceit, colossal Tuscan columns stood in each corner of the central great room. Neoclassical gestures notwithstanding, the original entrance façade was strangely asymmetrical, with a five-sided bay window and a square corner bedroom flanking a small wooden front door. Despite these aesthetic anomalies, Stafford envisioned "a modern country home with natural textures and colors," he says, a place he could spend weekends with his wife, Stephanie, and his young sons, William and George.

To realize his vision, Stafford commissioned San Francisco architect Ken Linsteadt, a protégé of Philip Johnson, and St. Helena

interior designer Erin Martin. Linsteadt clad the ancillary buildings with reclaimed barn timbers and Colorado sandstone, and he transformed the exterior of the main villa with hand-troweled sandstone-colored plaster, opening the spaces to the outdoors with large steel-and-glass windows and doorways. He also unified the entrance façade by creating a tall portal defined by a boxy wood frame that "announces unexpected changes within," Linsteadt says.

Inside, the architect and designer reconfigured the floor plan, strategically adding or subtracting walls to mitigate dark, monumental spaces. "We wanted a natural, organic flow and not a processional quality inside," Martin says. "We also wanted to establish better connections to the outdoors." Other tweaks helped to alter the interior scale and rhythm. "The original entrance hall was long and dark, and I wanted to change that," Martin notes. "I'd spotted a fifteen-foot-long sales counter in a clothing store in Palm Desert, and I made sure they sold it to us. Ken made a niche for it in the widened hallway."

A steel spiral staircase leads from the basement to the living room and continues up to a catwalk that skirts new clerestory windows. "It's like a vertical hallway," says Martin. Steel-and-glass windows throughout let in dappled light, while recycled timber beams, plank-wood flooring and hand-troweled plaster walls all add warmth.

The living room's quirky back-to-back sofas by Belgian designer Axel Vervoordt maximize the family's use of the space; the two





























Duclou armchairs are by Christian Astuguevieille for Holly Hunt. A coffee table of thick laminated leather strips by Martin and Garth Miller Studio, a custom fabric-and-metal chandelier by Martin, wall pieces by the Cuban collective Los Carpinteros and a large antique candelabra from Obsolete in Los Angeles provide texture and interest. To echo the room's banished Tuscan columns, Martin added 19th-century columnar floor lamps she found at Bourgeois Boheme in Los Angeles. "The huge horrible columns are gone," she says, "but the tones and colors are still inspired by Europe."

Elsewhere in the villa, murals by artist Michael Dute depicting wild turkeys and California bears and bird graphics woven into rugs provide evidence Martin's penchant for levity. The powder room's backsplash of petrified wood tile from Restoration Timber is paired with a towel hook made from the arm of a vintage *santos*. "Your home should always make you smile," Martin says.

In the dining room, barrel-shaped woven-rush dining chairs from Ralph Lauren are paired with a two-piece oak dining table that can easily be separated for smaller parties. "The Staffords wanted a little bit more color and pattern than I usually use," Martin notes. She added striped accent fabrics, pillows covered in Pre-Columbian textiles and artwork where she could. New and vintage lanterns in several rooms add a kind of nostalgia without veering into country kitsch.





LINSTEADT RELOCATED THE KITCHEN TO THE NORTH SIDE

OF the house; now a large glass-and-steel tilt-up window opens the kitchen island to the pool courtyard. "To go from the kitchen to the pool you had to cross several rooms," he says. "We wanted to open the kitchen up for parties and to seamlessly engage the outdoors, because that's what you want in the country. It was our most important move." Martin used enormous hurricane glass cloches in steel braces as pendant lanterns above the kitchen island, and she had Michael Dute stud the wide kitchen hood with decorative nail heads. Passageways on each side of the stove also link the kitchen to the living room. "Flexibility is key in any good interior," the designer notes.

Martin enlivened a paneled wall in the family room with African tribal art. "We used wedding trousseau baskets," the designer explains. "That's a lot of brides!" A Moroccan rug from Woven Accents in Los Angeles lies underfoot, and a yellow throw is made of hair from the neck of a Moroccan goat. A room just off the kitchen that was once a bedroom is now paneled with recycled wood and resembles the screened porches of rural Pennsylvania, where Stephanie is from.

"The best thing about the master bedroom is that you feel like you're in a tree-house," says Martin. "It's calm and subdued, but it's also a space where you can be a kid again, and that's a good feeling to have at all times." A metal four-poster bed inset with tea-stained camel bone, designed by Martin and Brian Kennedy, and a Stratford chair and ottoman by Formations are understated yet decorative accents.

"It feels like a new house even though we didn't expand the envelope or the footprint," Linsteadt says. The Staffords like it so much they rarely leave except to "walk in the town square or shop at farmers' roadside stands," Jim Stafford says. "When you have a retreat like this, you really don't want to get out of the woods very much." ■ Erin Martin Design, 707 963 4141 erinmartindesign.com, Ken Linsteadt Architects, 415 351 1018 kenlinsteadt.com