

Picturing Perfect

A couple puts down roots in a longed-for home reimagined for relaxing and entertaining.

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Architecture: Stephen Sutro, Sutro Architects Interior Designer: Alison Pickart, Alison Pickart
Home Builder: Ken Pickart, AP-Build, Inc. Landscape Architecture: Shelby LaMotte, Roth/LaMotte Landscape Architecture





In the new stairwell of an Alamo home, designer Alison Pickart created a sitting area with Rose Tarlow Melrose House armchairs from Shears & Window upholstered in an Edelman suede. She found the table at Skelton + Culver in Houston, and the chandelier at Coup D'Etat. The custom redwood wallpaper was designed by Pickart and fabricated by de Gournay.

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or a pair of empty nesters, the remodel of an East Bay estate represented a much-desired family retreat. Over the course of the husband's career, the couple had moved 14 times, so they were more than ready for a long-term residence. With their designer,

Alison Pickart, at their side, they began the process of gutting a 1990s house perched on a hill in Alamo overlooking the rolling landscape dotted with oak trees and redwoods. "We kept the original envelope," says Alison, who worked with architect Stephen Sutro and general contractor Ken Pickart, her husband, on the project. "We reconfigured the rooms so they would take advantage of the serene view, giving the homeowners the tranquility they wanted."

Work started at the front door, with Alison and Sutro agreeing that the foyer's staircase had to go. "It was this huge, grand thing with columns, and it didn't feel very comfortable," Sutro recalls. By tucking a stairway into an adjacent octagonal turret that had housed an office on the lower level and a bedroom above, the team was able to open the newly created foyer to the sprawling vistas enjoyed in the living room. It also meant they could rethink the entire flow of the dwelling. "Moving the stair resolved the home's problems, and we were able to regularize the geometries of its octagonal, square and rectangular spaces. It made everything feel more friendly," the architect explains. Alison notes that the improved flow allows residents and guests to better move throughout the spaces. The living room, once a dead-end, now joins the kitchen via a bar, creating a circular traffic pattern that includes the family and dining rooms.

"If you're willing to explore the process, there's nothing that's impossible when it comes to design," Alison says. A perfect case in point is the stairwell's custom, hand-painted wallcovering that features images of towering redwood trees and a lush understory marked by ferns, wildflowers and the occasional forest animal. "The space needed something to give it life, and we wanted to create an element that's true to this location, and thus we landed on the trees," she explains.

To further personalize the wallcovering, the designer incorporated images of carved initials on the tree trunks. "We don't actually condone doing that, but we made an exception here," says the husband, noting that it's the initials of the couple's three children, all recently wed, as well as their own. "It's simply spectacular," says Alison of the feature that de Gournay, the manufacturer, has since put into production.

The concept of personal, memorable touches done in a palette of browns, blues and greens is established in the main stair, but the idea is carried throughout the home. The living room, for instance, is anchored by a rug the owners found in Istanbul. "We texted Alison from a shop, and she said, 'Grab the one you like the best and we'll make the room work around it!'" recalls the wife. "We've lived all over the world and have collected pieces that have ended up in storage. In this house, we could pull them out and showcase them."

The kitchen, which doubled in size and gained a breakfast nook, is designed for cooking and being together. "We spend a lot of time there," says the husband. While he admits to being concerned about the size of the large island initially, he now appreciates the move, noting, "We use every inch of it!" In the adjoining family room, Alison converted an octagonal sunken bar into a cozy alcove the wife enjoys. "When I want to rest, I make a beeline for that spot," she says. Upstairs in the couple's bedroom, a beverage center is tucked between the dressing room and primary bath, giving the space the feeling of a luxury hotel suite.

Outside, Alison worked with architect John Clarke of John Clarke Architects, landscape architect Shelby LaMotte and builder Andy Mascheroni of Mascheroni Construction to create a recreation space that includes a pergola, an infinity pool, a lounge area and a lush culinary garden. The designer says she pictured gatherings where the wife would step out and harvest ingredients for a gracious dinner for guests. "Alison has tremendous vision, and she had that backyard image in her head from day one," says the husband. The designer says that vision was instrumental in the creation of the home. "If you show people what's possible, they'll go for it," says Alison. "People are inspired by design." ■

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The living room offers plentiful Gregorius Pineo seating options, all from Kneeder Fauchère. The sofa and upholstered chairs are covered in a Rogers & Goffigon linen, and the Louis XV-style armchairs feature a Boussac striped fabric. Artwork by Jeremy Holmes hangs over the mantel, and on the opposite wall is a custom hand-woven wool piece by Alibay Bapanov.



Left: An alabaster Vaughan chandelier from Shears & Window illuminates a new bar just off the living room. The walls are clad with tiles by Sonoma Tilemakers, and Stapp's Fine Woodworking crafted the millwork.

Opposite: The homeowners' silver collection—many of the pieces were found during their travels through Europe—decorates the pantry, painted with Benjamin Moore's Iron Mountain. The countertops are by Neolith.





Above: The designer chose Manuel Canovas textiles for the breakfast nook's pillows and Lee Industries chairs, which she found at Wittford. The table is by Julian Chichester and the shade fabric is Nobilis. "The size, scale and layout really set this house apart—and the views of the valley and Mount Diablo are incredible," says general contractor Ken Pickart.

Opposite: The pool pavilion was designed by Alison and architect John Clarke and constructed by builder Andy Mascheroni. RH armchairs and ottomans upholstered in Perennials fabrics surround Serena & Lily coffee tables. Above is a Paul Ferrante lantern.





A Rose Tarlow Melrose House four-poster bed and Oomph nightstands define a guest room. The linens are by Matouk, and the drapery fabric is by Clarence House. The sheepskin rug is by The Rug Company.

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