

* SPECIAL DECORATING ISSUE

Metropolitan Home

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**Jamie Drake
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JUNE 18, 2007
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In the music room, where the family of four gathers to sing and play instruments, a wall of 21-foot-tall windows draped with a sheer linen curtain overlooks a grassy hillside. Designer Jay Jeffers repurposed the vintage 1960s sofa. The curve-backed chairs and side tables are also from the '60s. Opposite: The two-level house, clad in cedar slats and charcoal-colored stone with aluminum reveals, commands panoramic views.





A COLORFUL POINT OF **VIEW**

MET HOME OF THE MONTH ARCHITECTS CATHI AND STEVEN HOUSE AND DESIGNER JAY JEFFERS CREATED A WARM, MODERN HOME THAT MAKES THE **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA** LANDSCAPE PART OF ITS INTERIOR.





LIVING IN ONE OF SAN FRANCISCO'S

storied Victorian houses has its charms, but roominess isn't among them. For one couple, life with their two children in a historic 20-by-40-foot townhouse in the city got to be a bit too cozy.

"We needed more space, more privacy and more sunlight," says the wife, a music teacher, singer and songwriter. So she and her husband, a software engineer, headed for the hills of Marin County, just 20 miles across the Golden Gate Bridge but a world away from the crowded streets of San Francisco. The couple bought an acre of land with steeply sloping contours but dramatic views south toward Mount Tamalpais.

Although they were living in Victorian surroundings, the homeowners weren't total strangers to modernism. "Our taste had drifted toward modern over the years," says the husband. He and his wife did a thorough remodel of their former home that introduced smooth plaster and concrete floors. "That definitely whetted our appetite to work more with those kinds of materials," he says.

After a search for Bay Area architects, the homeowners hired the husband-and-wife team of Cathi and Steven House of the aptly named San Francisco firm House + House (former Met Home of the Year contest winner). They asked the architects for a home that was modern but comfortable in its rural surroundings. "We wanted the house to match the pace of the setting, laid back but sophisticated," says the wife. They also wanted lots of space for entertaining indoors and outdoors, a garden and a level area for the kids to play. "Although we like big rooms and open plans, we also respect privacy," the wife adds.

Above: In the family room, designer Jess Jeffers mixed textile patterns of different scales, subtle Jack Lauer Larson graphics for the sofa paired with a tartan Debraze & Little moose plaid for the ottoman and a playfully retro Henry Cavill print for the Michael Berman armchair. The painting is by Gary Hubbard. *Opposite:* Sliding glass doors connect the family room to a terrace where the homeowners take in the Marin County hills.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW MILLMAN.
WRITTEN BY RAUL BARRENECHE.



BECAUSE THERE WASN'T much flat area on the steeply sloping site, the architects partially buried the lower level of the two-story, 3,100-square-foot home into the hillside. The entrance is through a stepped landscaped courtyard that leads to a skylit gallery painted the same bright acid green as one of the wife's favorite pairs of shoes. There's a lofty family room at the center of the house that opens onto a terrace through towering sliding glass doors. To one side is the master suite, to the other are the kitchen, dining room and a music room.

The couple didn't want a proper living room. "We do salon parties, where everyone gathers around the piano with cocktails, and we and the kids sing. There's always music in the house," says the wife. "We don't miss having a formal living room at all." Downstairs are the children's rooms, a guest room, a study and a playroom that opens onto another terrace and the lap pool beyond.

The owners worked closely with the architects. "We hit it off really well. It was two couples around the drawing table all the time," says the wife. One of the couple's top requests was for tinted concrete floors throughout the house. Interior designer Jay Jeffers of Jeffers Design Group in San Francisco helped guide them in choosing the rich, warm beige. The architects mixed 21 different batches to get the nose just right. "With colored concrete, a drop extra can make it too green or too pink," says Cathi House. The warmly neutral concrete floors (embedded with radiant heating coils) extend throughout all the public spaces to tie the rooms together visually.

Above: The east facade shows the upper-floor dining room's tall, narrow windows. *Left:* The terra-cotta-tinted Venetian plaster of the double-sided fireplace creates a large block of warm color between the music room and the dining room beyond. The reupholstered armchair is vintage; the rug is textured jute. *Right:* A pair of Cellini chandeliers hangs strategically on either side of a skylight.





JEFFERS WAS INSTRUMENTAL in guiding the selection of fabrics, carpeting and draperies, as well as materials like the terra-cotta-colored Venetian plaster covering a freestanding fireplace and an acid-green back-painted-glass backsplash in the kitchen. "The clients wanted color, but not a Mondrian canvas of reds, blues and greens," says Jeffers, who managed to include nearly every color of the spectrum in his soft palette. There are large blocks of color, like the fireplace and backsplash, but the general palette is subtle: cream tones with muted blues, taupes, greens and peach.

With music such an important part of life in the house, Jeffers had to add enough sound-absorbing materials to minimize echoes and reverberations. But he didn't want to hide the walls of floor-to-ceiling windows. Where too much sunlight might cause fabrics to fade, the designer installed UV-protective blackout shades that roll out of sight. In the family room, he added linen sheers that filter sunlight.

The architects also brought in daylight from above with narrow strip skylights over the dining table, in the entry hall and the master bedroom, using skinny glazing and deep soffits. In the master bedroom, a wall of floor-to-ceiling glass surrounds one end of the tub, and a glass door leads to a private terrace. "Even in winter, you can take a bath drenched in sun," enthuses the husband. "When I walk out of there, I feel like I just came from a spa."

The soothing vibe extends throughout the home. "It's such a cheerful house because of the color and light," he says. "Even on a dreary, foggy day, you don't feel like leaving."

Above: A kitchen backsplash of back-painted glass picks up the green veining of the granite countertops. Right (clockwise from top left): In the master bedroom, a floating wall of angled wood in different tones hides a dressing area; windows in the skylit entry gallery look back at the landscaped hillside; the master bathroom suite, with a 13-foot-long concrete counter, opens onto a tiny balcony.



WHAT THE PROS KNOW

Architects Steven and Cathi House and designer Jay Jeffers have their own theories about working with bold colors. The architects suggested the clients walk around their property and collect bits of bark, moss, branches and rocks. When it came time to pick building materials, they referenced the natural samples. The tinted concrete floors were inspired by the bark of oak trees on the site; the cedar siding was the color of autumn leaves. Jeffers suggests using color in an "intelligent way. Don't paint one room in four different colors," he says. "Pick one that's continuous throughout the house—to tie different rooms together—and then bring in other shades with the patterns of fabrics and artworks." Jeffers says when considering bold colors, the brightness of a room is more important than the size. Bold colors aren't automatically off-limits in small spaces. "Sometimes I use a dark color in a room that doesn't get much light; sometimes I use bright colors. But the light is the most important thing."



DETAILS

1 In the family room, a chair by Los Angeles designer Michael Berman mixes with a vintage 1960s brass floor lamp and a solid walnut side table from Twentieth Art & Design in Los Angeles. The floral medallions on the linen curtains are hand painted.

2 Light refracted by the cut Austrian crystals of the Gellula dining room chandeliers creates patterns on the wall above the owners' cherrywood dining chairs, which Jeffers reupholstered in plain and brightly patterned fabrics from GP & J Baker.

3 In the lower-level playroom, Jeffers designed armless vinyl-upholstered sofas with four-inch casters so they can be rolled out onto the adjoining outdoor deck. The painting, of one of the couple's daughters, is by Esta Sinclair.

4 The architects used butt-jointed glass to maintain an uninterrupted view of the surrounding hills through the corner window of the master bedroom. The armchair and ottoman are by A. Rudin; the brass pedestal table is vintage.

5 In the master bathroom, materials converge where the shower stall meets the vanity: anigre cabinets, a concrete counter that reappears as a shelf inside the shower and 1/2-inch glass mosaic tiles from Waterworks.

6 Because the powder room is small but has 11-foot ceilings, Jeffers added Cole & Son's *The Woods* wallpaper, with a pattern of bare trees. "I thought it would be fun to play up the bright with the trees," says Jeffers. The architects designed the walnut counter and backsplash with a glass basin from Vitraform. ●
See Resources, last page.



