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A collage by San Francisco artist Rex Ray enlivens Tracy Chapnick and Josh Cohen's colorful North Beach condominium. Shelves from Ikea bracket a media cabinet built by Chapnick's father. The end table, bought at Richard Witzel, was made from a cast-iron water-meter cover. The vintage Lucite coffee table is from Den.

Style from Scratch

Eclectic, colorful design brings a fresh-out-of-the-box North Beach town house brightly to life.

by Martin Holden | PHOTOGRAPHS BY Matthew Millman

ANYONE CAN SHUFFLE AROUND THE REGENCY CHAIRS in some society matron's parlor. But take a couple with strong ideas, a limited budget, and a brand-new, spare space to decorate and you have a challenging project. That's what Tracy Chapnick and Josh Cohen had to offer when they tapped Jay Jeffers to decorate their two-story town house in the North Beach Malt House development.



The pair took to the Texas-bred, San Francisco-based interior designer, with his shock of blond hair and easy smile, immediately. "I liked his style," says Chapnick. "He seemed like someone I wanted to spend some time with."

Even so, the clients had more ideas than time to devote to decorating their first home. Chapnick is an attorney at 24-Hour Fitness in San Ramon and Cohen a fellow in

cardiology at UCSF. But they had definite opinions about the project. "I had been pulling the pages out of design magazines for years," says Chapnick. "So I had a lot of ideas. But I didn't know how to put it all together. I needed someone to be a sort of director."

A guiding theme arose early on. "They wanted it to feel like a really cool, comfortable boutique hotel," says



ABOVE: An unusual '60s-era rolitop desk by furniture designer Vladimir Kagan sits with a new chair by Alameda's Randy Castellon, who originally designed the piece for the restaurant Citizen Cake. Chapnick picked up the vintage bathing suit, hanging in a frame that designer Jay Jeffers had made for it, at a shop on Haight. BELOW: Cohen and Chapnick lounge on their comfortable couch.

"They wanted it to feel like a cool boutique hotel. Accents could be quirky, but not the whole room."

Jeffers. "It needed to be sophisticated. The accents could be quirky and fun, but not the whole room." The dining area became "the Lounge," replete with '50s- and '60s-era furniture from retro-chic stores Den, Swallowtail, and the Apartment.

"This was new construction, with no personality of its own," explains Jeffers. He adds, "I tend to work with modern furniture a lot, and I love to mix it with classical architectural elements." Here,

the only element of interest was a concrete column in one corner (which he left bare) and some exposed plumbing. "I chose to ignore that," says Jeffers.

The owners were easier to work with than the space. "Tracy had some great ideas, like turning vintage bathing suits into art," says Jeffers, who had frames built to hold the unusual pieces. On other fronts, the couple had to be convinced to take risks. Chapnick and Cohen were concerned about light





ABOVE: In "the Lounge," vintage '60s chairs from Dan (near the window) and a coffee table from the Apartment mix with a new Niedermaier lamp. Jeffers made the curtains and chair slipcovers and designed the dining table. The Venetian glass chandelier was purchased on the web. San Francisco painter John Baden warmed up the white walls. BELOW: Jeffers also designed the couple's bed.

Jeffers had to coax the couple into a few decisions. "I felt like I was taking some risks," Chapnick admits.

and eager to keep the blond wood floors. Jeffers persuaded them to try a darker walnut-colored stain, a visual trick that gave a foundation to the furnishings. "It was scary," Chapnick admits. "I felt like I was taking some risks. But I said to Jay, 'You're the designer. Do it.'"

Next came the walls. Jeffers suggested a novel compromise between his instinct that the space cried out for color and his clients' passion for white. Rectangular panels of subtle, carefully selected colors were painted on the walls of each room, leaving the corners and ceilings unadorned. It was a creative fix, and cost-conscious.

So were several furniture solutions. Jeffers designed the bed. But when plans for a custom, built-in cabinet for the living area got too expensive, he found an alternative at Ikea. The shelving makes a fine home for the clients' eclectic collection of accents and heirlooms, including a vintage purse bought at a flea market in France and a grandfather's old medical books—the kind of thing not even the best designer or furniture store can provide. "The whole thing is a creative expression of who we are," says Chapnick. "It's fun to just walk in and say, 'Ahhhh!'" □

Martin Holden writes regularly about architecture and design for this magazine.

