

5 Modern Guesthouses That Go Up in 24 Hours ...

House Beautiful

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Spaces

That Feel
Enormous

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Open House

SAN FRANCISCO

At the end of the day, design is often about problem-solving—so **Editorial Director Joanna Saltz** recruited five Bay Area designers to share their tips for cracking every code.



Joanna Saltz
@josaltz

Want to talk? E-mail me at editor@housebeautiful.com.



Noz Nozawa
@noznazawa

Joanna Saltz: How much of your job as a designer is actually solving clients' problems?

Jay Jeffers: In the beginning, it's kind of *all* problem-solving: How do you make a big house feel intimate, or a small house feel big? Or somebody wants to have parties for 200 and dinners for 10—how does that all happen in one space?

Catherine Kwong: And then there's the actual hard work of making that happen. We can say, "I want this to be a serene space," but does that mean all the toys are going in the cabinet every night?

Jay: I like the client to be involved in the process. You can see their lightbulb go off when you, for example,

think up the perfect storage for suitcases in their closet. They're like, "You can't believe how much I hated those suitcases being stored there—you just fixed that!" And I'm thinking, Oh, great!

Jo: They get to experience your solution every day.

Noz Nozawa: So much of what we do is aesthetic, but it's grounded in how to make someone's home work for them. Even if we're dreaming up fabulous couches, there's a part of me that thinks, OK, we still have to make this



Fornasetti Senza Tempo's Acuario print for Cole & Son gives a narrow powder room by Finley an expansive feel.

Kelly Finley
@joystreetdesign



For a client with a puppy, Nozawa used performance fabric and a dreamy—but commercial-grade—wallpaper by Calico, which is easy to wipe down.

PHOTOGRAPHERS: JEFF JONES (POWDER ROOM); MATTHEW MILLMAN (BEDROOM); JOHN MERKEL (KITCHEN); COLLIN PRICE (LIVING ROOM)

No fewer than five playful patterns were introduced into this bedroom by Jeffers, proof that the best design solutions aren't always the most obvious.



extremely practical: They have three kids, two dogs, and three cats. Everything needs to perform.

Kelly Finley: I think about the problems we face during the implementation phase. Like, I've never done a house where they actually followed my lighting plan—because there's always a beam somewhere. One of my favorite quotes is from Mike Tyson: **"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."** But I actually find solving those problems really fun and exhilarating—arguing with the contractor about whether or



Jay Jeffers
@jayjeffers

not they can do something, challenging them when they say they can't.

Jo: OK, so what's your favorite problem to solve?

Catherine: We see this one in San Francisco a lot: The clients have a very outdated old Victorian, and they task us with creating a modern space while still maintaining some of the original character.

Kelly: I love the challenge of renovating an old house, because you're confined in terms of space. It makes you really think outside the box!

Noz: Or finding extra space in a home you're renovating. One home we worked on had a kitchen with a very awkward nook in it, and the clients were thinking, Could it be a desk? Or a breakfast nook? Finally, because the kitchen came



Kwong surveys clients about their habits at the start of every project. If they always eat in the kitchen, counter stools—like the ones in this client's cool blue kitchen—are in order.



Catherine Kwong
@catherinekwongdesign



Emilie Munroe
@studiomunroe

"It's the nature of these infinite challenges that not only gives us value and worth in our role, but also creates the spirit of the whole project."

—EMILIE MUNROE

up against the master suite, we were like, This could be a master bathroom!

Jo: Life changing.

Noz: Literally! The clients are stoked.

Emilie Munroe: As the designer, you're kind of the spirit guide on a journey of self-discovery for every client. You're creating solutions for challenges they have yet to even face.

Catherine: We're doing a survey in the beginning that's like, "Will you eat every meal in the dining room, or are you going to sit at the counter every day?" Just tell me! Because then we can work around it.

Jay: Right. In the end, we're creating dream homes. That means getting inside their heads and understanding where they're coming from.

Jo: People are basically putting their lives in your hands.

Kelly: And their money!

Jay: But it happens all the time in this business: A problem turns into a solution that's so much better than what it was in the first place.