

Silicon Valley

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The top-floor family room, which takes full advantage of the stunning view, is appointed with a custom sectional along with swivel chairs and a coffee table by A. Rudin. A vibrant side table, of Jessica Nakamoto's design, and the accent pillows draw on the picturesque setting's palette.

CITY CHIC

A Peninsula couple enlists a talented team to conjure the ultimate urban retreat.

*By Anh-Minh Le
Photography by Bernard André*

The day after Bruce Sewell sent his wife, Cynthia, the listing for a 4,300-square-foot beaux-arts style residence for sale in San Francisco, he left for a business trip to Europe. By the time he arrived at his destination, there was an email from her waiting for him. Bruce—who, until December, served as the general counsel for Apple—summarizes her message thusly: “I’ve seen it. I love it. I’ve made an offer.” The offer was contingent on him touring and approving the place upon his return. And while Cynthia was all-in, Bruce needed a bit of convincing. “He basically said, ‘Look, I don’t have the vision. I don’t see it, but if you do, I trust you,’” she recalls, adding: “I had always wanted to take an old house with good bones and renovate it.”

In 2016, with their two daughters out of the house and retirement looming for Bruce, the Sewells were ready to embrace urban life—at least on a part-time basis. They purchased the 1929 pied-à-terre, located in the Pacific Heights neighborhood, intending to maintain their primary pad in Atherton. As fate would have it, the completion of the San Francisco renovation, which took about 18 months, coincided with the end of Bruce’s eight-year tenure with Apple, allowing the couple to now split their time between the city and the suburbs.

Wanting to keep the original features that were intact and in good condition—such as the circular staircase with its wrought-iron balustrade—yet bring the home into the 21st century—from clean-lined furnishings to state-of-the-art security and entertainment systems—the Sewells turned to what amounted to a dream team. For the interiors, CONTINUED...

STYLE & DESIGN

home



From left: The breakfast nook is outfitted with a table and chairs by Gregorius|Pineo, beneath Ochre's Arctic Pear tiered chandelier; in the living room, the sofas, as well as cocktail and console tables, are custom, while A. Rudin armchairs flank an Ironies silver faux bois resin drum table.



...CONTINUED they reunited with Jessica Nakamoto, who had also contributed to their Atherton dwelling and recently started her own design firm, Ineffable Interiors. Francis Gough served as the construction architect, while Keith Anding was the design architect. Finally, builder Jeff King came on board for what he initially thought was the renovation of a handful of bathrooms. "The scope was about four times what I expected it to be," he says. "We did a pretty major retrofit on the house. It was structurally very intensive, and we tore the house up in that respect." Although the project evolved into a massive collaborative and creative undertaking, he marvels that "it went off without any major hiccups."

While plenty of changes were made for seismic and structural reasons—like the addition of three steel moment frames in the basement—when it came to the cosmetic updates, it was a matter of "cleaning everything up and reducing some of the noise," says Bruce. Gone are the faux finishes, stone surfaces with pink tones and even a kiva fireplace that once inhabited a corner of the family room. Of

the latter element, Cynthia jokes: "You have this beaux-arts 1929 house, and then all of a sudden, it's like, *Welcome to Santa Fe!*" Now, all-white walls and moldings (Benjamin Moore's Simply White), plus the liberal use of Carrara and Calacatta marble, create a crisp backdrop. With room after room bathed in natural light, and ceilings that range from 10 to 12 ½ feet in height, a cool and airy feel pervades the home.

The ground level includes a garage, gym and laundry room, all of which were refreshed by the Sewells. The second floor contains the living room, dining room, kitchen with adjacent breakfast nook, and office. Three bedrooms, among them the master suite, occupy the third floor. Ascending the elegant staircase, the expansive views of the bay, encompassing the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz, become increasingly prominent until they stop you in your tracks on the top floor—which underwent the biggest transformation, and is devoted primarily to a family room and a rooftop deck.

Of this latest joint effort with Nakamoto, says Cynthia, CONTINUED...



The dining room includes a Jun Ho sideboard and a Hellman-Chang table surrounded by custom chairs covered in a Designers Guild fabric.



Clockwise from top: The deck is furnished with seating by Harbour; the master suite's bed, nightstands and tête-à-tête are all custom designs; the homeowners worked with Dolby Chadwick Gallery to curate the art, including the salon-style arrangement in the entry.

« “We realized that there was more we wanted to do — structurally, mechanical/electric and aesthetically—to create a house exactly as we imagined it to be. In the end, we are happy we did so.”

—CYNTHIA SEWELL »

...CONTINUED “We had a lot of fun working on creating and executing my vision for this house.”

The through line is a neutral palette, occasionally disrupted by hits of color courtesy of accent items and artworks. (The task of curating art gave the Sewells another opportunity to conspire with Dolby Chadwick Gallery; the firm had been enlisted in Atherton too.) “When you do a monochromatic design,” Nakamoto notes, “you *have* to play up the texture.” The living room is anchored by a pair of 9-foot custom sofas with Cowtan & Tout velvet upholstery. In the master bedroom—which, Nakamoto says, “was inspired by a foggy day on the bay”—the custom headboard, stretching 130 inches wide, is covered in a linen with a range of gray tones and a rippled texture. In the family room, a sectional in a cotton blend with a soft hand beckons you to sit and enjoy a drink from the nearby built-in bar. Pillows in solid blue mohair and a Holly Hunt pattern called Reflecting Pool draw on the scenery, as does a side table of Nakamoto’s design; its vermilion hue is a nod to the Golden Gate Bridge’s International Orange color.

Although the scope of the project snowballed, by all accounts, it was a success. “As time went on,” says Cynthia, “we realized that there was more we wanted to do—structurally, mechanical/electric and aesthetically—to create a house exactly as we imagined it to be. In the end, we are happy we did so.” The result is a testament to not only the talents and work ethics of the group that she and her husband assembled, but to the Sewells themselves. “The thing that stands out to me the most is the teamwork that went into it,” says King. “Of course, that starts with the clients—they were just fantastic and easy to work with. ... They were very generous in how they supported the process and stayed focus on the end game.” ■