



Material World: Hot new lamps made with thermoplastic L3

Garden: Too late for tomatoes to catch up? L2

Home & Garden

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Clockwise from left: The fireplace “became a piece of art”; the bath has a terrace and view; a wall of storage space divides the master bedroom.



Arts, crafts and comfort

Sonoma home remodel in tune with surroundings

By Tracey Taylor

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Like so many home renovations, this one began as a relatively modest kitchen remodel — then it developed project creep.

Architect Gregg De Meza first saw the three-bedroom home, located on a beautiful 7-acre site in Sonoma's Wine Country, in 2007 when its owners asked him to help them design a new kitchen. Soon, however, De Meza found he was sitting with the couple in their living room talking about how the home's interior flow could be improved. “Eventually we made a pass at rethinking the whole house,” he says.

The home and its separate guesthouse had replaced a cluster of 1970s stone buildings on the property. The

Remodel continues on L4

HOME

Architect brings the outdoors indoors

Remodel from page L1

owners were happy with what they had achieved so far, but felt the home lacked cohesion.

"We wanted to make the most of the panoramic views and really make indoor-outdoor living a reality," says De Meza. The owners were also keen to combine the fine architecture with the best artisanal craftsmanship — "Arts and Crafts ideals with a contemporary twist," as they put it.

The first step was to visualize the home as three distinct zones — a public living area, a two-bedroom suite and a separate master suite that includes an art studio. Defining the spaces helped generate ideas on how to furnish them.

The open-plan living and dining space was the key challenge in terms of how it worked in practice. "One idea was to have the functioning spaces pushed out to the perimeter," De Meza explains. After brainstorming with the owners, he decided to do a flip and to pull all the rooms into the middle of the house. This meant the kitchen became the heart of the space and the windows and doors were left free to provide uncluttered views and easy access to the outdoors.

The open kitchen and dining area is cleverly separated from the sitting area with cabinets made from Honduran mahogany. These conceal the television and audiovisual components on one side and function as kitchen storage on the other.

Anchoring the center of the house is the home's piece de resistance, a fireplace with a 5-foot-square opening and a soaring chimney swathed in patinaed copper. "This began as a straightforward feature and became a piece of art," say the owners, who credit De Meza with having the vision to design the piece.

Also on the wish list was a desire to incorporate natural materials, another concept in keeping with the philosophy of the original Arts and Crafts movement. The tone was set with the home's 2-foot-thick exterior walls, which were built from fieldstone gathered on site. But it doesn't stop there — one wall of stone bisects the home's entrance, making for a seamless flow from outside to in.

The interior walls are a mix of hand-troweled Italian plaster and Honduran mahogany wood paneling. The main floors are made of integral colored concrete, while in the kitchen, crafted by Berkeley Mills, De



Photos by Toshi Yoshimi / De Meza + Architecture

Rather than push functioning spaces to the perimeter, Gregg De Meza pulled them to the center of the home to maximize views. The exterior, top, is clad in fieldstone that was gathered on site. At right, the wood-paneled powder room.



Resources

De Meza + Architecture, 375 Alabama St., Suite 400, San Francisco, (415) 436-9600. dma-sf.com.

Meza used stained end-grain oak. "Everyone loves the contrasting textures and how the rough interacts with the smooth," he says. Using two very different materials side by side can produce creative effects, he notes.

In the master suite, De Meza put the skills he has acquired working on yachts to good use, tucking much of the storage

space into a sleek, freestanding wall that separates the sleeping and dressing areas. Custom-made paneling, built-in cabinets, nightstands and an upholstered headboard bring to mind a captain's cabin.

The spa-like master bathroom is one of the owners' favorite spots. Accessible from the bedroom through glass doors, it features a large set of French doors that open up 180 degrees to a private terrace overlooking a sweeping vista that takes in many of the property's several dozen old oak trees. A softly curved freestanding tub is sited to fully exploit the views. The owners

say the etched glass shower enclosure resembles a glowing lantern when it is lit at night. Limestone floors, walls and countertops complete the picture.

The renovation was not without its challenges. "Because we wanted something truly original, we were asking people to do things they had never done before," say the owners. "We were pushing craftsmen and designers to an edge."

This inevitably involved a measure of trial and error, and some projects had to be started over. Access to the rocky, hillside lot was problematic too,

and items such as steel beams had to be brought up in small sections and welded together on site.

But the owners took a sanguine approach. "We had realistic expectations, and we took risks on our own nickel," they say.

The result is a home that is very much in tune with its surroundings — framing glorious views and naturally cooled on hot summer days by its substantial walls — but that makes no compromises when it comes to creature comforts.

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