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SAN FRANCISCO



Wine Country *Chic*

A hilltop Napa Valley estate becomes a family retreat.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER SERGENT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BESS FRIDAY



Interior Design: Lauren Nelson, Lauren Nelson Design





Designer Lauren Nelson filled existing shelving in the breakfast room of this Napa Valley home with her clients' vintage pieces, interspersed with new objects from Bloomist and San Francisco boutiques Super Simple and Yonder. The concrete-and-reclaimed-wood dining table is from Mecox, and the chairs are by Croft House.

Designer Lauren Nelson knows a good thing when she sees it. In this case, it was her clients' new weekend home overlooking Napa Valley, which had been renovated by celebrated local architect

Howard Backen. He opened it up with walls of windows and filled the interiors with a custom formula of "Backen white," according to a 2013 article on the house in the *Wall Street Journal*. "It had this energy to it, but also a peaceful feel," Nelson says. "My favorite architectural elements are the old wooden monastery doors set in the otherwise pared-down, trimless architecture. I think the juxtaposition is really interesting."

The 10-acre setting was ideal for her clients, a San Francisco couple who'd been searching for "the perfect place" to spend weekends in the Wine Country—a spot where their two young children could grow up in a wild, natural environment, yet not too far away from the region's celebrated restaurants and attractions. "They were craving this more casual, more country, indoor-outdoor space," says Nelson, who decorated their chic, Parisian-influenced house in the city's Marina district. Luckily, landscape designer Claudia Schmidt had previously surrounded the home with olive and fruit trees, a rose garden, and a terrace underneath an ancient Chinese pistache tree, providing the alfresco respite the owners craved.

For Nelson, that meant there was no immediate need for any structural intervention, inside or out. As she devised a new furnishing plan, though, nothing could be too pretentious. "We did our best to pick things that are kid-friendly," Nelson says, noting that the living room sofa is upholstered in indoor-outdoor fabric, and the dining room rug is outdoor grade by Perennials. In contrast to their more formal city home, the designer notes, "the family wanted it to feel like a house where everyone can come in and be comfortable. We kept that at the forefront of the design."

Nelson built on the richness of the home's three massive antique doors with a spectrum of additional wood tones through furnishings such as

a walnut custom console in the living room; pale Japanese tansu chests in the main bedroom; and a hearty, honey-hued farm table in the dining room. She also added some much-needed texture through various Moroccan rugs and diaphanous window treatments that gently frame the broad views.

Nelson added personality through layers of art and artifacts: Chunky black-and-white beads hang by the front door beside a modern print in the same palette; vintage baskets line a wall in the living room; and whimsically shaped ceramics make appearances everywhere. In the main bathroom, a bouquet of dried flowers hangs next to the bathtub. "I just love those finishing touches—that's what makes a space feel unique," says Nelson, who started her career doing styling work. The wife is a graphic designer, she adds. "So she's really tactile. She gets excited by moments—vignettes."

The wife also loves strategic doses of color. The most prominent example is in the living room: A large custom work by Spanish fine-art photographer Andrea Torres Balaguer features a woman dressed in deep jewel tones against a dark teal background, her face obscured by a bold pink slash of paint. "That piece has such emotion to it and depth of color," says the wife. Likewise, the main suite comes alive with a deep blue grass-cloth wallcovering that anchors a white channel-tufted bed. "It made the whole room pop. I love blue!" the wife says, but Nelson made sure it wouldn't interfere with the views. "The focus is on looking outside," Nelson says, noting that white draperies recede from the windows that frame the mountainous horizon against an infinity pool just outside a door to the rear deck.

As she did inside, Nelson added "modern but tactile furnishings" on the deck that spans the back of the home and on the small terrace that sits under the graceful limbs of the pistache tree. In the future, the owners plan to upgrade the kitchen, reconfigure the home's lower level, and add a new guest wing; San Francisco architect Stephen Sutro, who helmed the couple's city-house renovation, will come back for the Napa home's next phase. In the meantime, it's served as a beautiful refuge for the family, just an hour outside the city. "We lived here for six months during the pandemic," the husband says. "It was such a magical place to be." ■

A large sectional by RH covered in durable Perennials fabric centers the large living room. The Sierra armchairs are by Croft House, and the sofa table is also by RH. The walnut side console is custom, and the rug is by Armadillo. The sconce (one of a pair) is by Apparatus.







Right: In the vestibule to the main bedroom, a blue grass-cloth wallcovering leads the eye down a hallway from the entry. The Moroccan rug is from the Tory Kitz Gallery. The vintage chair is from Attico. The fine art photography is by Robert Stivers.

Opposite: Nelson designed the dining room to be high-contrast, highly functional and kid-friendly. The farmhouse table is by RH, the side chairs are by Consort, and the outdoor-grade metal Windsor chair is by Rejuvenation. The rug is by Perennials purchased from Sutherland, and the mirror over the mantel is custom. The framed photograph is by Robert Stivers.





Right: Nelson added vintage rattan barstools from 1st dibs to the existing kitchen bar, located at one end of the dining room. The home's interiors, including the kitchen with its marble countertops, creamy white walls and travertine floors, were designed by architect Howard Backen during a 1990s renovation for the previous owner.

Opposite: A dining table by Gloster, surrounded by Terassi side chairs from Design Within Reach, is placed on a deck that spans the rear of the house and overlooks Napa Valley and the hills beyond. "The view is pretty spectacular," says the wife, noting that they enjoy the flickering lights of downtown Napa at night. "It has this energy, but at the same time, you feel really removed."



A custom channel-tufted bed stands out against the deep blue Cowtan & Tout grasscloth wallcovering in the main bedroom, which looks out across the valley. Vintage tansu chests from The Zentner Gallery act as bedside tables, and the vintage sconces were purchased on Hotalo. The Brazos wall mirror is by Yucca Stuff, and the rug is by Loloi. The beaded wall hanging by the bed is from General Store.



