



Friendly Disposition

A historic San Francisco home's
gracious spirit is revived
with a little Southern charm.

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Architecture: Stephen Sutro, Sutro Architects
Interior Design: Lisa Hilderbrand, Hilderbrand Interiors
Home Builder: Joey Toboni, The Toboni Group



In the living room, designer Lisa Hilderbrand paired a Louis Philippe mirror from Avery & Dash with a lamp from Chairish, an antique Austrian chest and contemporary charcoals by Jean-Marc Louis. A.T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings slipper chair adds a modern note.

In a city known for its vertical Victorians, arriving at this 1907 home in Pacific Heights feels positively sylvan. The house is that rarest of things in San Francisco architecture: It's wider than it is tall. And with windows on all four sides, its rooms enjoy an abundance of daylight, not to mention views that stretch to Alcatraz Island. "With a courtyard entrance and symmetrical façade, it's very stately," says architect Stephen Sutro. And while pushing open the wide, original front door reveals several grand entertaining rooms, this is very much a family house designed for easy living—though it took a while to get there.

The home had been well cared for and retained many period details (leaded windows, fireplaces, pocket doors), but renovation work revealed a failing foundation. That made for a bigger project than was wanted by the homeowners—a young couple with two children—but it ultimately gave them the chance to improve the home in ways they hadn't initially imagined. "We had to jack up the house, so we thought we might as well dig down two feet and make the undeveloped basement level a proper living space," the wife says. "It was like doing surgery," adds Sutro, explaining that lowering the floor not only gave the downstairs rooms proportions that matched the main rooms, it leveled the house with the garden, making it immediately accessible.

"This project was about knitting new into the old," continues Sutro, who worked closely with project architect Sammy Calabrese, general contractor Joey Toboni, and the homeowners over a two-year period. The team replaced the rigid geometry of the central stairway with a sweeping design and enlarged the galley kitchen by transforming a semi-enclosed rear porch into a breakfast (and homework) nook. "We wanted the house to feel fresh—a house has to fit the patterns of contemporary family life—but we wanted to do it without changing the original language or spatial relations," Sutro continues. "The home was reconstructed, yet you can feel the period architecture as you walk through," Toboni adds.

Maintaining the home's historic feel was critical, as it was why the couple chose the

house in the first place. "When first married, we had a sleek, modern loft and I loved it, but when our oldest child was born, I found myself wanting to change things," the wife says. "I grew up in a traditional Colonial-style brick house, and I wanted that sense of solidity." To create the layered interiors she envisioned—antiques, interesting artwork, sentimental touches—she called on longtime friend and interior designer Lisa Hilderbrand, who also worked on the family's interim rental. "We've been friends since college," recalls the New York- and Connecticut-based designer, who shares a love of antiques with her client. "We have the same practical sensibility, too," the wife adds.

Together, they set out to create rooms that Hilderbrand describes as "comfortable and classic, not intimidating or fuddy-duddy." Much of it was realized on what the wife describes as a "stars-aligned, four-day shopping trip in New York City," where the two found more than half of the home's furnishings, including the living room's 1950s glass chandelier and a pair of Pierre Frey swivel chairs. "It was like inviting people to a party, like creating conversations," the wife adds. Speaking of celestial bodies: In the dining room, hand-painted Italian wallpaper on the ceiling depicts a moonlit sky, paying homage to the couple's engagement, which took place on Bright Moon Mountain in China. (The moon is a recurring theme throughout the home, appearing on a Japanese screen on the lower level and in a painting of the California coastline in their bedroom.)

Keeping the formal rooms from feeling too fussy are natural-fiber carpets. "They create such a pretty backdrop for fancy woods," the designer notes. Countering the big, public spaces are cozy, tucked-away spots, too, like a sitting room just off the kitchen. And there is, of course, the home's new lower level with entertaining space, a wine cellar, and the husband's study. Its bluestone floors flow outside to the barbecue and sitting areas that flank a small lawn—an elegant design devised by Sutro and the wife.

"This house could be pulled out of Charlottesville. It's genteel but not stuffy," the wife says. "You just feel special going into this home," Hilderbrand adds. "It's like a wonderful embrace." ■



The living room banquette is upholstered with Jed Johnson Home fabric, and a painting attributed to Paul Rand from Chairish hangs above. Pierre Frey swivel chairs are covered in a Kravet velvet. Set within the room's panelling is a Jane Churchill wallcovering.



Right: To lighten the stairwell and extend it through all three floors, architect Stephen Sutro worked with Coyne Stair to devise a more fluid, sinuous design. The antique Sarouk Fereghan carpet was found at auction and restored.

Opposite: In the husband's mahogany-paneled study, an antique secretary was reimaged as a bar cabinet. The leather chair is from F.S. Henemader Antiques. On the ceiling is a Holland & Sherry wallpaper, while a jute rug by Fibreworks grounds the space.





The home's exterior was refreshed with Farrow & Ball's Hardwick White for the walls and Clunch for the trim. A Bevelco gas wall lantern illuminates the garden, which includes a sitting area with Brown Jordan seating and a vintage Giacometti-style table from Chairish.

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—STEPHEN SUTRO