

# Haven in the Hills

*A former one-story adobe house nestled in the hills of California's Marin County is reimaged into a rambling family home with a nod to its past*

*By Patricia Shannon  
Photographs by Bess Friday*



## SCENE STEALER

The ceilings in the home's original adobe rooms range from 8 to 9 feet, which didn't feel lofty enough to take advantage of the vast view. "We wanted to add on and make a great room that felt appropriate for the size project we were doing, but still connected to the original house and style," says homeowner and designer Courtney Smith. That meant finding the best view on the property and building the main living space around it. The walls, covered in Phillip Jeffries Island Raffia in Island Malta White, provide texture and warmth; window muntins and mullions painted Benjamin Moore Martha's Vineyard frame the stunning water views.



**I**t was time to go. Bay Area–based designer Courtney Smith had decorated and redecorated her family’s traditional Georgian to the point of excess. She was ready for a new project, and children Jackie and Drew were ready for a shorter school commute. The answer came in the form of a 1950s-era adobe with a 1980s addition nestled in the hills of Tiburon, a small town just over the Golden Gate bridge in Marin County. While the house might have lacked promise to the untrained eye, Smith could see the bones, and they were begging for a new beginning. “It was a one-story ranch with a tile roof and adobe construction in hacienda style,” she says. “It had that overgrown Santa Barbara thing with a great view.” The full acre property was a find for the area, and the commute to school was nearly nonexistent. It was a done deal. With the help of architect Jessica Fairchild of Fairchild Broms Design, Smith and her husband, Greg, began with a set of plans but revised them as they spent time in the house and got to know it better, she says. What resulted made the most of the home’s original adobe construction while introducing thoughtful additions that added breathing room and space for the family to entertain. “I really wanted our house to feel like it could have been here for a long time,” says Smith. “I wanted the feeling of not so shiny and new, but more welcoming and approachable. But still spacious, like it might have been here forever.”



### CITRUS NOTES

Top: “The first thing I selected for this project was the kitchen wallcovering,” says Smith. The circa-1947 vintage print, *Citrus Garden* by Josef Frank, “had many of the elements I wanted to repeat on our property,” she adds, from citrus trees in the front garden to design choices throughout the interior. “Because the home is so open,” everything else has to relate. Things don’t need to match, but need to flow from room to room.”

### CHILD’S PLAY

Above and opposite: “This was the home’s formal living room, but when we renovated, this side became more of a kid zone,” says Smith. “We embraced that shift by adding lots of textiles and patterns and encouraging movie and karaoke nights.” The designer calls her decorating style a mash-up that takes a home’s architectural style and its inhabitants into consideration. “You have to have enough pattern, play, and color to make the house interesting,” she says, “which also hides the inevitable stains and wear and tear.”





*“This home’s bones reflect my appreciation for contrast: a mix of old bricks, aged brass, textured raffia, natural stone, vibrant wallcoverings, and traditional fixtures”*

—Courtney Smith

### PAINT BY NUMBERS

“I may be a maximalist with wallcoverings, but when it comes to paint, I’m 100 percent practical,” says Smith. The designer used four paint colors throughout the house, all of which are Benjamin Moore: Chantilly Lace, Martha’s Vineyard, Mariner’s Tale, and Hancock Green. “I find it maddening to keep track of a zillion paints, and simplifying paint schemes has the added benefit of creating visual cohesion,” she says.

### POOL RULES

“I think rooms feel terrible when they’re just pass-through spaces, and no one is ever using them,” Smith says. “You can feel that in a home.” She wanted a dining room suited for holidays and more formal hosting, but also wanted a space that could be used regularly. “My husband is a pool shark, so a billiard setup felt like a good way to have this room serve double duty,” she says. The custom-made convertible table is set up for billiards the majority of the time (inset) and easily converts into a large dining table for eight (below).



### ROOM WITH A VIEW

The bedroom wing was an addition that included two children's rooms on the ground floor and the primary suite (this page) just above. Because the home didn't have a second floor to begin with, Smith had no idea what the view would be, though she had an inkling it might be spectacular. It did not disappoint. She covered the walls in the same raffia paper used in the great room to further the cohesion in the rambling layout. Opposite, top: "The screens behind the bed are a favorite pattern, but I didn't want to cover the entire room in such a feminine print," she says. "I like the impact they have on that tall focal wall."



### HISTORY LESSON

Above: While Smith focuses on functionality and lifestyle needs when she's designing a space, she also puts an emphasis on elements that are aesthetically true to the period in which the home was built. "For all the baths [including the primary bath, above], I chose materials that could have been selected when the original cottage was built," she says. "I wanted the foundational elements of the home to feel consistent with a hacienda built in the 1940s or '50s."

### OFFICE HOURS

Left: It's a running joke within the Smith family that Greg hates a long commute. He works from home full-time (as does Courtney) so the designer created a tucked-away office space within their bedroom that requires a mere six steps and no chance of rush hour traffic. While the space is pretty enough for display, pocket doors allow Greg to close the space off after hours.

## BRIGHT IDEAS

Instead of asking her children what they wanted their rooms to look like, Smith asked them what they wanted them to feel like. Drew requested a library; Jackie, a French picnic (below). Smith ran with it, creating two distinct quarters that mirror each other in layout but bring a unique style to see the young teens through their college years. Both rooms play off their natural light sources, which meant leaning into the warmer tones that came along with Drew's hillside view. "I think it's a mistake to try to make a darker room bright," says Smith. "Embrace that it's a dark room and make it cozy."



## SUITE DREAMS

Right: In the guest suite, Smith opted for twin beds with vintage headboards to better accommodate a variety of guests, not just couples. Showing her appreciation for contrast, she placed the Dorothy Draper dresser against a punchy backdrop, Banana Leaf wallpaper in Coral Pink by Sharon Lee of Krane Home. "I adore [Lee's] use of color," says Smith. "Her patterns scream 'happy.'"



## GOLDEN STATE

"We live in a climate that is nice for 10 months out of the year and wanted our front garden to support indoor/outdoor life," Smith says. "We use our firepit several times a week, whether for wine and cheese with family and friends or for s'mores when the mood strikes." The garden also features abundant citrus trees that make for fresh lemonade at a moment's notice.