

# GRACE NOTES

*With the help of decorator Palmer Weiss, a young San Francisco family rejuvenates a rambling 1908 Shingle Style house, endowing it with a gentle new spirit*

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In the living room of a San Francisco house designed by Palmer Weiss, the sofa, covered in a Clarence House fabric, and the club chairs are all custom made; the cocktail tables are by Harrison-Van Horn, the 18th-century walnut chairs are Italian, the round side table is by Bunny Williams Home, and the curtains are of a fabric by Elizabeth Eakins. **FACING PAGE:** A pair of photographs by Vincent Fourmier in the dining room; the chairs are by John Rosselli, and the vintage light fixture is by Boris Lacroix. See Resources.





From the picture windows, the San Francisco landscape looms large: the sculptural cypress trees, the gray-blue bay, the Golden Gate Bridge. Decorators never work in a vacuum, but when Palmer Weiss first visited this house, built in 1908 and perched on the edge of the Presidio, a heavily wooded former army base turned celebrated national park, she knew the surroundings would play a more prominent role than usual in her design. “Those epic views—you don’t want to fight them,” says the designer.

The home’s enviable location in Presidio Heights, a quiet neighborhood of tony Edwardian houses, was precisely what drew her clients to it in the first place. But as the parents of three girls, the couple saw even more to love inside the four-story shingled house. “We bought it from friends, and we had watched their children grow up in it over the years,” says the wife. She knew the layout would be perfect for her family, with a generous eat-in kitchen on the open main floor, a downstairs den big enough for both an exercise space and a play area, and a top floor that could accommodate bedrooms for all three children. The house had also been recently renovated, so it was in pristine shape when the family moved in.

From the start, the homeowners brought a certain San Francisco attitude to the decorating process, tasking Weiss with a design that fit the classical architecture but didn’t feel, as the wife puts it, “over-

wrought and precious.” Personality was paramount. “This is a city that attracts people who don’t feel constrained by rules,” says Weiss. “As a decorator, those are my favorite kind of clients.” It was a project that seemed tailor-made for Weiss, a Charleston, South Carolina, transplant whose deep reverence for antiques (which she inherited from her decorator mother) is matched by a passion for, in her words, “radical” contemporary art. Throughout the house, she managed to deliver quietly elegant spaces that are punctuated by bold, and often wry, artworks. It’s a home that wears its beauty nonchalantly and with a wink, much like the city itself.

Working largely with a muted palette inspired by the landscape outside, Weiss sought out vintage and antique pieces with the right combination of sophistication and subtlety, from a Milo Baughman brass bench to 18th-century Venetian chairs. “I could point to almost 100 things in this house I found on 1st Dibs,” says Weiss. But she designed just as many of the furnishings herself, including a 10-foot-long tufted sofa and many of the case goods, working with a team of craftsmen. For a pair of midcentury-inspired console tables in the living room, she enlisted four different artisans to handle the various elements of their design, from constructing the leather-upholstered frames to refinishing the brass handles. “Yes, I am obsessively detail-oriented,” Weiss says with a laugh.









The study's custom-made sofa is covered with an ikat by Shyam Ahuja, the same fabric used for the shades; the vintage armchairs are by Karl Springer, the cocktail table is by David latesta, and the rug is by Stark. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The tabletop in the breakfast room is by Caesarstone, the chairs are by Jonathan Adler, and the sofa is covered in a cotton by Holly Hunt; the side table is by Tucker Robbins, the floor lamp is by the Urban Electric Company, and the rug is by Stark. A Restoration Hardware sofa, with cushions in a Perennials fabric, Jonathan Adler side chairs, and a Saarinen cocktail table on the terrace. The kitchen's sink and fittings are by Waterworks, and the counters are Carrara marble. See Resources.



The master bedroom features bedding by Leontine Linens, a headboard and bed skirt of a Quadrille linen, and a bench by Milo Baughman; the daybed is upholstered in a Savel fabric, the curtains are of a Christian Fischbacher cotton with trim by Samuel & Sons, the sculpture is by Sam Perry, and the carpet is by Abbey Carpet. **FACING PAGE:** Weiss designed the bunk beds in the playroom; the light fixture is by Oly, the shade is of a hemp by Peter Dunham Textiles, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore Aura in Pink Fairy. See Resources.







The homeowners appreciated Weiss's aesthetic restraint as much as her attention to detail. "There may be nailheads on a chair, but there are not nailheads, plus trim, plus a leopard-print pillow," says the wife. The couple did, however, encourage Weiss to be fearless when it came to the art. Interested in building their collection, they tapped the designer (who studied art history but does not profess to be an art adviser) to suggest pieces, a process that's ongoing. "What I love about Palmer is that she isn't bringing me safe, predictable pieces—anybody could do that," the wife says. "She brings me this totally out-there guy, Vincent Fournier, taking photos of Mars research missions in Utah." Conceptual pieces by Stephen Gallo-way and Rachel Perry Welty also serve as fresh counterpoints to the home's traditional leanings.

Walk up the spiral staircase that leads to the children's rooms on the fourth floor, and things "get decidedly more whimsical," as Weiss puts it. The designer, a mother of two herself, took the homeowners' daughters—ages 8, 11, and 13—as seriously as any adult clients. For one daughter, she covered the walls in thick sea grass, so she could tack up every drawing and medal. For another, she created a bed with hideaway shelves for figurines—"little girls come with an astounding number of tchotchkes," Weiss says. And in the pale-pink playroom, she designed built-in bunk beds for sleepovers and cabinets custom fitted, to the inch, to hold all their dolls.

But even the more formal living room isn't the kind of space that has to be all but cordoned off from children. The upholstery fabrics, as well as the Oushak rug, are forgiving of the occasional spill (Weiss's team put almost everything to a red wine and ketchup test). And a large, flexible seating arrangement allows for both intimate conversations and big family gatherings.

Indeed, it's as much a place for soigné cocktail parties as it is for games of charades. And sometimes the family just winds up together on the sofa, watching the San Francisco fog roll in. ■