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Less is More

IN MARIN COUNTY, A STORIED ESTATE IS REBORN
WITH A HOME AND GARDEN THAT HARMONIZE AS ONE.

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ARCHITECTURE / KEN LINSTEADT,
KEN LINSTEADT ARCHITECTS
INTERIOR DESIGN / PALMER WEISS,
PALMER WEISS INTERIOR DESIGN
HOME BUILDER / JB FERRARONE,
PLATH & COMPANY
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE /
JANELL HOBART,
DENLER HOBART GARDENS, LLC



Sometimes, the best addition to a home is subtraction. When architect Ken Linsteadt began to reimagine the estate his clients had purchased in Marin County, he started sketching. “It may be a dying art form in my profession, but I can’t think clearly until I’ve spent time drawing,” he says. “That’s when the ideas begin to flow.” As he sketched the 2-acre property that’s hemmed with rugged stone walls and fortified by mature live-oak trees, one idea kept unfolding: Less was more.

Although long considered a grand estate, the home started life as a simple, shingled cottage. “At some point, it was added on to, and it became a large, L-shaped structure that felt a bit incongruous with the landscape,” says Linsteadt. “We needed to take it back to a simpler form and engage the surroundings as a natural extension of the house.”

It was, after all, the landscape that attracted the owners to the property. “I went to high school around the corner,” says the wife who, as a student, would often walk by the entrance and wonder what lay beyond the gates. When she and her husband relocated to Marin County from San Francisco, she couldn’t help but continue to wander by the moss-covered stone fence, intrigued by the setting and the privacy it promised. She eventually wrote a letter to the former owner, asking if she would ever consider selling. “I must have hit her at the right moment. Within a month, we were the new owners,” the wife says.

With Linsteadt on board, the reinvention of the residence began. “An added wing cut the house off from the garden and obstructed the view of a stunning large oak tree that is truly the heart of the property,” says Linsteadt. “By removing it, we brought the home back to its roots and focused on creating a better flow toward the terraced garden, right down to the pool.”

Inside, the clients sought to keep the feel of the original dwelling, while improving the circulation. “The layout was like a warren of small, dark rooms—as opposed to a light and bright integrated whole,” says the wife, who wanted to create flow throughout the formal and informal areas and envisioned a large, sun-filled kitchen and an adjacent cozy family room with direct access to the gardens.

Linsteadt went to work opening the spaces to one another, maximizing natural light and orienting the residence toward the gardens and tree lines. Meanwhile, landscape architect Janell Hobart worked in tandem with him to design outdoor rooms and gardens that felt at once accessible and harmonious with the architecture. “The gardens before were super terraced, with so much disconnect, chaotic plantings and no continuity whatsoever,” says Hobart. “We started afresh, but we saved all the mature trees while creating a garden that’s much more accessible to the house.”

Meanwhile, the couple hired designer Palmer Weiss to deliver a fresh take on the interiors. Weiss executed their vision for the decor by using modern, fun pieces with traditional silhouettes that complement the outdoors. “The house has a definite sense of grandeur, but its setting is Marin County, where the natural world is celebrated,” says Weiss. “You don’t want interiors to be fighting for attention with the views outside. Instead, we wanted the design to live up to the grandness of the estate without being stuffy or sterile. This is very much a family space, and the clients have three children and a dog who live and play here. It was essential that the home deliver sophistication, but also feel comfortable and relaxed.”

Weiss kept to a serene color palette, which moves from soft mauves and grays in the formal living room and private bedrooms to more energizing shades of green, teal and blue in the public living spaces. She chose moments to be intentionally casual, designing an oversize, bright-teal sectional for a more relaxed spirit in the family room. Weiss delivered luxury to the formal dining room with statement-making green de Gournay wallpaper and an antique chandelier from Europe. Her happy place is in the mix of the two, says the designer. “We walked the line between traditional and modern, high style and low fuss, and in the end it feels polished—but very family friendly, too,” she says.

And now, the owners say their favorite moments involve wandering outside into the garden, watching the children swim, and picking vegetables and fruit to eat. Thanks to Hobart’s expertise, something is always growing and flourishing, says the wife, who often leaves a basket full of fresh produce from the kitchen garden outside the property’s entrance gate. No doubt passersby—as she once was—still pause there to get a glimpse of the magical landscape before walking away with its fruits. ■

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In the dining room, designer Palmer Weiss started with the de Gournay wall panels. "The millwork in the home is beautiful, and we did not want to detract from that," she says. "But every dining room needs a touch of drama." The drama is enhanced by a Venini chandelier (it came in more than 140 pieces and had to be reassembled on-site), a bespoke ebonized table and custom Erinn V. dining chairs.





Architect Ken Linsteadt endowed the living room with larger window to bring light and views into the house. Weiss added a soothing color palette to highlight the furniture mix which includes a gray sofa and a love seat with wood arms, both by Baker. Across the room, another love seat by Patricia Edwards sits near the windows. A pair of McGuire armchairs and coffee tables by David Latesta complete the scene.



Opposite: Linstead located the new kitchen centrally in order to open it to the exterior. Now the space is where the family spends the most time together, and Weiss created this dining area with that in mind.

A Bungalow 5 oval table with a custom Caesarstone top maximizes seating and promotes flow, while chairs from Hollywood at Home have child-friendly upholstery. The light fixture is by Julie Neill.

Below: Although it's a new building, the Cabana is designed to look like a vintage barn that has always been on the property. It serves as a pool house, a guest house and a gym. The outside is colored with a custom stain and the entry is flanked by vegetable beds created by landscape architect Janell Hobart.



Opposite: The Cabana guest room is a Linstead favorite. "It's vaulted, open and looks into the old oak trees," he says. "It feels like a treehouse." The Charles Fradin bed is dressed in linens crafted from Loro Piana fabric, while the pillows and shade are made with an Osborne & Little textile. The star of the art collection hanging over a chest from Jefferson West Inc. is the blue, green and black work by Phillip Sutton.

Below: In the living room, art consultant Jody Brunk Knowlton selected the contemporary pieces that surround the family portrait in the gilded frame for a fresh, layered look. They hang above an antique black desk with a gilt detail, a black chair by Oly Studio and a Charles Edwards table lamp.





Weiss wanted to create a master bedroom that's peaceful, so she chose a soft color palette for the room, including the bespoke bed by Belmar Fine Custom Upholstery that's crafted with Ronda Carman fabric, the plush mohair chairs by Lee Industries and the rug from Abbey Carpet & Floor. The graceful chandelier is by Paul Marra and the Smilow bench at the foot of the bed is from Hewn. The lush green photograph by Elger Esser was selected by Knowlton.



