

Send to printer Close window

# Roots Remembered

A house that carried its past into the future.

BY P.J. BREMIER



PHOTOS BY BARBARA RIES

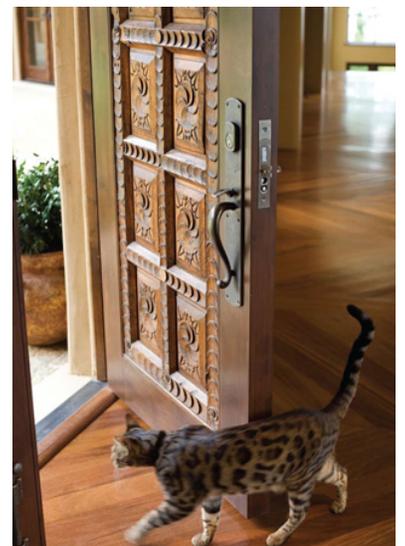
A beautifully designed home, like the most chic style-setter, requires knowing how to edit—what to keep and what to discard. That's the case with this California Mediterranean home, high on a Ross ridgetop, which was given an updated look during an extensive remodel four years ago.

But its new owners, who had purchased it a few years earlier, had fallen in love with—and were determined to preserve—keepsakes of its past, including its lavishly embellished front doors, a peaked pine-planked ceiling and 100 garden roses beloved by the previous owner, an accomplished rosarian.

“We loved the rustic hand-carved design of the front doors,” says the homeowner. The doors were 17th century, brought by the Spanish conquistadors to South America, where centuries later, the former owner of the house bought them, and subsequently inset them as panels in a new larger set of double doors. The couple also admired and kept the living room's pine ceiling, which exuded an old-world feeling, studded with big iron braces and bolts. It serves as a perfect frame for a vista of Mount Tamalpais.

The home's 19th-century hand-carved oak molding and a small sitting room chandelier found their way up a circular staircase into a tower room, whose windows open onto a view of the remodeled landscape, which includes 200 new rosebushes.

The garden of this 4.5-acre property, irrigated entirely by well water, is still tended by the same French gardener who has worked there for 40 years. “He helps me grow a lot of the food that we enjoy all summer,” the homeowner says.



This recurring blend of continuity and freshness found its way into the architecture, too. The original house was about the same size and had Mediterranean styling, the homeowner says, “but we added many more style elements that are more in keeping with the California Mediterranean design: arches, curved walls and moldings, a graceful Wallace Neff–inspired entry loggia, elegant French doors and balconies, stone fountains and urns, and old-world lighting fixtures.”

The couple’s preference is a relaxed lifestyle, so they insisted on a beautiful home that also “looked like real people lived in it and who could put their feet up on the couch,” the wife says. “I had assembled a binder with images from magazines I had collected over several years that showed furniture and fixtures I liked. Linda Marks of Marks & Marks Design thumbed through the book and said, ‘OK, I get it.’ And she did.”

Using a restrained earth-tone color palette, Marks imbued the spaces with luxurious, natural materials: rich Cumaru wood laid in a herringbone pattern in the entry hall, true Italian terra-cotta in the kitchen and family rooms, custom wool rugs from Stark Carpets for the living room and master suite, and sumptuous window treatments in the master suite by Brunschwig & Fils and Cowtan & Tout. “Everything is classic,” Marks says.

She made sure the children’s bedrooms were playfully sophisticated and grounded them in saturated color to absorb, rather than reflect, the sunny exposure. The master suite is cool and serene, with a balcony that overlooks the garden and pool and a cozy anteroom that serves as offices, library and television room.

The downstairs is devoted to the pursuits of family and visitors with guest suites, a gym, and separate rooms for billiards, media and projects.

Because the homeowners, supporters of Ross School and WildCare, like to entertain, they needed a kitchen that would support their efforts. The oversized granite island, Marks says, “is a great working and entertaining space” and the dumbwaiter eliminates extra trips by easily lifting groceries to the kitchen either from the car or the second refrigerator in the garage below.



Special attention was also paid to the home’s customized, keypad-controlled lighting schemes in order to create dimension and drama. “It doesn’t matter how beautiful the architecture or furnishings are,” says lighting designer Vita Pehar; “if they are lit inappropriately, it does not feel good.”

In the living room, for example, she used decorative wall sconces for ambience, lamps for reading and strategically placed low-voltage spotlights to create interesting visual focal points.

Subtle lighting was important outside, too, where Michael B. Yandle’s eponymous Ross landscape architecture firm oversaw the landscape remodel. He wanted a “warm glow—like candlelight—that leads you through the garden.”

“Sometimes,” he says, “you have to build drama into a site, but in this case the site, situated on a saddle ridge, has almost 360-degree views, so the key was not to conflict with the drama and scale of those magnificent off-site views.”

His design allowed the garden to unfold in a series of public and private spaces: some open and dramatic, others intimate and cloistered, and all linked by lawn or Santa Barbara sandstone.

Yandle kept the existing oak and cypress trees, but also imported Sevillano olive and English laurel trees; established boxwood and privet hedges; and planted the cascading terraces that flank the grand staircase with roses, perennials and bulbs and single cypress trees. Other beds, lush with fruit trees and even more roses, conceal a solar array that greatly

reduces the home's electricity usage.

It's hard for the owners to pick just one space they enjoy most. "Our favorite spaces change as the light changes," the wife says. "In the morning, we love to read the paper and have coffee out on the south loggia and watch the light changing on Mount Tam. In the afternoon, we love to entertain friends or hang out with our kids and pets by the pool and enjoy the afternoon sun."

"I pinch myself every day," her husband adds. "We love living here."

## Build Team

### **Contractor:**

Bruce MacDougall & Kevin Clark

### **Interior Designer:**

Marks & Marks Design

### **Lighting Designer:**

Vita Pehar Design

### **Landscape Architect:**

Michael B. Yandle Landscape  
Architecture

### **Landscape Contractor:**

S & S Landscaping

