



SENSORY *SHIFT*

NATURAL MATERIALS AND UNIQUE FINDS DEFINE A SONOMA
RETREAT DESIGNED TO ENGAGE ITS SURROUNDINGS.

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INTERIOR DESIGN / STEVI MICHNER, MICHNER AZURDIA LIMITED
ARCHITECTURE / ROBERT BAUMANN, ROBERT BAUMANN + ASSOCIATES
HOME BUILDER / THOMAS BRIDGES, BRIDGES CONSTRUCTION
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / RICK YOUNGE, RICK YOUNGE LANDSCAPE DESIGN INC.



Designer Stevi Michner, with architect Robert Baumann and builder Thomas Bridges, transformed a Sonoma house with a new material palette and a strong indoor-outdoor connection. The exterior was given a new stucco finish by Galvan and Son Plastering, and Sterling Roofing Co. installed a new barrel-tile roof. Landscape designer Rick Younge revamped the entry garden to include boxwood hedges and topianes.

If you're standing in our backyard and look at the house, you'd swear you were in Tuscany," says Ralph Osterhout of the Sonoma home he shares with his wife, Toni. But that idyllic end result began with a circuitous journey. The couple had been using their Mediterranean-style retreat for about three-and-a-half years when they called in designer Stevi Michner, architect Robert Baumann and builder Thomas Bridges to help them with a few updates. But what started as a simple revamp of the kitchen and master bathroom, soon turned into much more. "Just looking at the rooms, it seemed it would be better to make them more harmonious and holistic," says Michner, noting that a previous addition had left the home with a disjointed feel. Once the decision was made to replace the flooring in the kitchen and a few other areas with reclaimed limestone from a 200-year-old French château, momentum took over. "That was a turning point," says Michner. "We thought if we were going to do the floors, we might as well do the stairs. That erupted into something new every week, until we finally said, 'Alright, we're taking everything down to the studs.'"

That snowball-like effect applied not just to the interiors, but to the whole structure. As Michner settled on the new aesthetic direction for the project, she let her material selection set the tone. "Materials are the inspiration and foundation of my practice," says the designer. "I select materials that are rooted in history with organic elements to soften the space." As such, the entire exterior was re-stuccoed and the roof was redone with new tiles. "The interior walls were also re-plastered, the fireplaces were replaced with more environmentally friendly gas ones, and salvaged beams were introduced to various rooms," says Baumann, who created the construction details to integrate the new items with the architecture. "Every room was altered in some way."

With that backdrop of new plaster and stone walls, Michner was able to imbue the interior spaces with a calming and sophisticated feel. "It's always important for me to know how a client wants to feel in a space," she says.

In addition to working with Michner, the wife also collaborated with designer Nicole Deicht of Nicole Deicht Design to select pieces for the living room, including sofas by A. Rudin, a Formations coffee table and two custom armchairs. Michner had draperies made by Georgina Rice & Co. with a raw silk by Christopher Hyland.



"When I found out that they bought this house as an escape from their loft in San Francisco, I wanted to create something well-balanced, in touch with the landscape and very, very tranquil." Along the way, the designer collaborated closely with Toni, and the two visited small boutiques and salvage yards together to come up with the unique finds that fill the home. "We'd take a step in each other's direction and come up with something we both thought would work," says Toni, who also worked with designer Nicole Deicht of Nicole Deicht Design to select some of the home's furniture. For the living room, Deicht helped Toni find two A. Rudin sofas, custom armchairs and a wood-and-iron coffee table. The pieces gather around a fireplace, which Michner clad with onyx.

In the dining room, a Moroccan chandelier illuminates a table custom-designed by Michner, who also designed many bespoke elements in the kitchen—the room that started it all. An Officine Gullo range, purchased by Ralph for Toni, and flown over from Florence, Italy, anchors the space, while a new retractable glass door opens the room completely to the outdoors. As Baumann notes, the removal of a loft above the kitchen, which allowed the new space to triple in height, was one of the project's "most significant

The entry door, made with fumed oak from reclaimed French barrels, was designed by Michner and crafted by HBB Studio in Portland, Oregon. The foyer area also features pieces selected by Deicht, including a Tripoli mirror hanging above a Dolle console, both by Formations from Shears & Window. The Gregorius Pineo pendant is from Kneeder-Fauchère.

A Formations Wooden Barrel chair from Shears & Window stands near the living room's limestone wall. The oak floors are by Francois & Co. and were installed by Raffo's Hardwood Floor Co.



In the dining room, a Moroccan chandelier by Tazi Designs hangs above a custom table designed by Michner, fabricated by HBB Studio and given a bleached antique finish by Nora Art and Design. The chairs are by Formations, and the draperies were made with a Zoffany fabric.

Reclaimed limestone from Francois & Co. lines the kitchen floor, and a pocket door by Fleetwood Windows & Doors opens the space to the outside. Countertops of leathered granite from Fox Marble complement a sink designed by Michner and crafted by Sonoma Cast Stone. Playa dining chairs and a custom bench, all by Formations, surround a custom table. The pendant is by Gregorius Pineo.



structural changes." Michner also designed a cast-stone sink and set it into leathered-granite countertops, which pair with Christopher Peacock cabinetry. "The house bears the unmistakable mark of Stevi's desire to create something that feels authentic and quite natural," says Ralph.

Another showstopping piece Michner designed is the 2,200-pound travertine tub for the master bathroom. The project's builder, Thomas Bridges, who deftly handled every aspect of the construction and often had as many as 20 people working on-site at a time, recalls the installation of the massive tub as part of the "unfolding mystery" of what he calls the "most sensational" job he's ever been a part of. "We worked out ramps and dollies to get it in there," he says. "Since a lot of the work was one-of-a-kind, things took a lot of thought, and the tub was no exception."

Part of the extensive renovation involved adding state-of-the-art technology to the house. Ralph, who created gadgets for James Bond movies made in the 1970s and 1980s and now develops optics for the military and augmented reality glasses for the entertainment industry, worked with North Bay AVS Design on the new system. Beyond typical smart-home automation, including lighting and music, other features were installed such as televisions that lift out of countertops and thermal chromotherapy steam showers, which are all controlled by remote or iPad.

The Christopher Peacock cabinetry in the kitchen picks up in the butler's pantry, where live-edge wood shelves, executed by Bridges, lend interest and texture. The wine storage unit is by Sub-Zero from Monark.

The owners' McGuire four-poster bed, accented with a lumbar pillow by Cade Home, and Moroccan rug act as focal points in the light-filled master bedroom. A rustic wood bench from SummerHouse lends further texture to the space. The accordion-folding door is by LaCantina Doors.



Despite its high-tech inner-workings, the old-world materials wrapping the structure leave the living spaces feeling relaxed and tactile. That feeling is amplified by the structure's now strong connection—through the kitchen's retractable door and three new sets of accordion-folding doors in the living room—to the outdoor spaces, which look out to expansive views of Mount Diablo, San Pablo Bay and private vineyards. Michner refinished the alfresco terraces, while Rick Younger, a Portland, Oregon-based landscape designer and longtime friend of Toni's, enlivened the entry with new wider steps and boxwood hedges and topiaries for each parterre. "Mass plantings of lavender, olive shrubs and agave provide a bold yet peaceful scheme," Younger says. The combined changes create engaging spaces both inside and out. "Sonoma has such amazing seasons that indoor-outdoor living is a must," says Michner. "Now they feel like they are always in touch with nature." ■

An imposing travertine tub, which was designed by Michner and fabricated in China, anchors the master bathroom. The floor features limestone with a linen finish by Haussmann Natural Stone.