



Hillside Haven

Developers were eyeing it as a tear-down and her husband didn't even want to tour it at first, but interior designer Heather K. Bernstein had other ideas for this Marin County house.

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INTERIOR DESIGN BY HEATHER K. BERNSTEIN INTERIOR DESIGN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER STARK
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: JEFF O'HANLON, J&J CUSTOM BUILDERS, INC.



"The kitchen was this tiny galley," Heather says. "You couldn't even fit two people in there." They opened the space to a newly-added family room (not shown here), and quieted it with white oak cabinetry and leathery Taj Mahal quartzite. Home-threads stools offer places to perch.

IN fact, Heather's first thought was that the vine-obscured, shingled residence looked like an oversized hobbit house. Then, she stepped out on the deck—gingerly, that is, because it came with a warning to use it at your own risk—and dialed up her husband Dave. "I said, 'Get over here right now!'" she recalls. "He was like, 'Seriously?'" They sat on the deck for half an hour—enjoying a treetop view that includes Mount Tamalpais but few neighbors—and began envisioning the place as a home for their blended family, one that includes Dave's two teenage daughters and her two boys, aged 10 and 11. "We fell in love with the location, and we began to see that if we got this house, we could make it something really special," Heather says. "They ultimately accepted our offer and

we got really excited to buy a dilapidated house that was falling down...during Covid!" To say this was a gut job might be an understatement. Many walls had dry rot and needed to go, the roof had to be replaced completely, and the foundation was crumbling. So, as Heather's general contractor, Jeff O'Hanlon, got busy ("He was phenomenal," she says), Heather started planning and drawing. "I'm not an architect," Heather says. "But I acted like one." Thankfully, she had Jared Polsky of Polsky Perlstein "on speed dial" to help with details and the overall plan. Somewhat miraculously in those pandemic times, the family was in within two years—which included waiting on permit approval for nine months along with the

renovation itself. "And we've been living here like the Brady Bunch ever since," Heather says. "It's a revolving door of kids and we love it." Adding only 150 feet to the main home in the form of a family room that opens to the kitchen and takes advantage of the view (see page 8), the interiors are designed to bring the family together (the commodious kitchen and living room, which retained the original fir ceiling) and carve out private spaces (the kids each have a room they helped design upstairs while the parents' primary suite is on the main level). The pool house is a free for all. The interior design, like all Heather K. Bernstein Interior Design projects, started with a "vibe board," pulled together with the help of her Senior Interior Designer,



Overgrown landscaping that once buried the house's original shingled exterior was replaced with hardscaping and simple plantings.



A custom table by Michael Finizio lends the dining room a contemporary flavor. It's surrounded by Thomas Hayes chairs covered in comfy-chic shearling and leather to invite lingering.



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4. On one end of the living room, a built-in bar features reeded oak doors and a mellow antique mirror used as a backsplash.

5. To give them more presence, Heather broke from the light and airy backdrops in small spaces, such as this mudroom/laundry room off the kitchen. "The spaces that I was more brave in are the spaces that I love the most," she says. A whimsical toile wall covering is also unexpected—and fun.

6. "This is really my dream bathroom," says Heather of her primary bath. Calacutta Oro marble and Waterworks fixtures in burnished brass soak the space in elegance. An Elsa Foulon Studio ceramic pendant light crowns the Jacuzzi soaker tub, which is positioned to take advantage of the view.

Reed Bloom. "There was an image of a painting of this woman kind of wrapped in a blanket," Heather says, "and I thought, *Okay, this is how I want you to feel when you walk in. I want you to feel like you're being hugged.*"

To capture the feeling, the designer relied on a quiet, neutral palette and a lot of cozy texture. Woods are mostly pale and subtly grained, set against warm white walls (Benjamin Moore's Swiss Coffee). Black window frames—many softened by natural linen draperies and shades—bring into focus the enviable view. Upholstered pieces feature gentle curves and are scaled for comfort, are joined by round tables and domed lighting that follow along.

These are rooms that embrace, for sure, and even encourage exhaling. And though the family has lived in the tailor-made residence for more than a year now, it feels like the ultimate getaway. "There is not a day that goes by that we don't say, *We love our house,*" Heather says. "It's so perfect for our family and how we live."

1. In the primary bedroom, a custom king bed is upholstered in textural Pollack Associates alpaca wool. The bed is flanked by oak bedside tables crafted by Oakland woodworker Tim Lovett. A Theodore Alexander pendant lamp marries function and art.

2. The primary bedroom's vaulted ceiling is paneled in hemlock. "I've learned so much about all of my wood species," Heather says with a laugh. "When it's raw it looks like an oak. It just has a beautiful tone that doesn't go too yellow or too red. So, we installed it and just left it."

3. In the office, a Lulu and Georgia hand-knotted Khloe rug anchors a modern desk. Floating oak shelves offer display space for mementoes.



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1. In the entry and in most spaces, Benjamin Moore's Swiss Coffee paint sets an airy mood. An Atelier de Troupe pendant and Tim Lovett table welcome guests.

2. "The living room was special to us," Heather says. "We wanted to preserve it by keeping the original details of the fir ceiling." They removed low rafters to open up the space, then furnished it with casual contemporary furnishings, including a Lawson-Fenning sofa, Stahl and Band daybed, and TMBO lounge chairs from Gestalt New York.



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3. Brown painted cedar siding replaced the original shingled exterior. "Our house is tall and can look ominous," Heather says. "The dark made it feel a little smaller and blend with nature." Teak RH furniture invites lounging.

4. "We had fun with the pool house," Heather says. "I love Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and bought the woven bull's head there years ago. I needed to design the whole space around it, which was hysterical."