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# VERDANT LIVING

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# CALIFORNIA COTTAGE

AS SEEN IN  
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San Francisco Cottages & Gardens

Designer Benjamin Dhong marries East- and West-Coast sensibilities in a Mill Valley home

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**Inside Story** (this page)  
In the front entry, visitors are greeted by a 19th-century French barometer clock, a family heirloom. The whimsical goat-legged stool is from Myra Hoefler Design in Heidelberg. In the living room, an inviting chair (concrete mix) is wrapped in a Lee Jofa velvet. The CB2 concrete coffee table provides a contemporary counterpoint to the more traditional feel of the seating. See Resources.



**Conversation Piece**  
When the husband requested a flat screen television above the living room's fireplace, Dhong enlisted Matthew MacCaul Turner to design an architectural element, complete with antiqued mirrors and iron hinges, to conceal it. **Crafty Design** (top right): The home's Craftsman-style architecture inspired the marriage of East and West Coast sensibilities in the interior. See Resources.



**W**HEN THIS 1960S MILL VALLEY bungalow became home to a young couple and their four small children, it was clear that its renovation would require a deft mingling of various influences and styles. The wife is a San Diego native, while the husband grew up on New York's Shelter Island, and a large collection of antique furniture handed down from his East Coast family needed to find its footing in their new California home. The homeowners enlisted mixmaster Benjamin Dhong, principal of San Francisco-based Benjamin Dhong Interior Design, to create a family-friendly retreat that would combine the aesthetics of both coasts.

But when Dhong spotted the gray-shingled Craftsman, which evokes a Cape Cod cottage, and took note of the towering redwoods lining the property, he felt that on the outside, at least, the blending of the homeowners' characters had already taken place. "It was the perfect marriage of California and the East Coast," Dhong says. He set about transferring that sensibility to the interiors, working closely with architectural firm Heydt Designs to create a clean, classic aesthetic for the five-bedroom home. "I wanted it to be traditional, but I also wanted it to feel like today," says Dhong, who harmonized vintage pieces with new elements to create the gracious design.

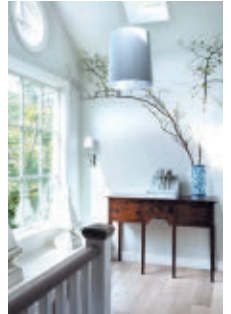
He began by conjuring up a wow moment in the foyer by immersing it in an oceanic blue. Directly opposite the entry, the formal dining room is a fresh take on old-meets-new: An heirloom Chippendale table and a mahogany breakfast are centered on a bold, blue-and-white accent wall.



Kitchen Cachet (opens in new tab) The kitchen is awash in natural light thanks to the dramatic bank of windows. Visual Comfort sconces provide a soft ambient glow. The banquette is covered in family-friendly vinylized Christopher Farr yellow ikat and faux white leather. Calacatta Oro marble counters (opens in new tab) exude a luxurious weightiness, while lemon-yellow Tolix Marais barstools from Design Within Reach add a light note at the island. A Restoration Hardware Victorian Hotel pendant (opens in new tab) adds drama. See Resources.

Because it's the living space of a young family, the designer wasn't shy about bringing in playful pieces to add whimsical notes





**Suite Dreams** (OPPOSITE PAGE) Silver-threaded wallpaper from Kneeder | Fauchère adds glamour to the master bedroom. **Color Coated** (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT) A girls' room boasts eye-popping wallpaper in orange and pink toile from Manuel Canovas. A farmhouse sideboard from the husband's family presides over the second-floor landing. In the powder room, the blue faux-bois wallpaper is from Nobilis; sconces are from Urban Electric. See Resources.

Dhong conceived of the idea after zoning restrictions prevented the creation of a window in the dining room wall. He then rifled on the Old World feel of the vignette by suspending a sleek, brass-lined enamel pendant above the dining table.

In the living room, wide-plank, distressed-oak floors add a rustic note, while a 10-foot sofa upholstered in linen and cotton mohair-covered armchairs provide luxurious (and ample) seating for the entire family. Dhong gave the space a little edge with the addition of two concrete coffee tables. "For me, a room is all about layering textures and keeping things balanced with a variety of shapes and styles," says the designer. "There's something about the interplay between the mohair chairs and the waxed cement tables

that adds a little sizzle."

Relaxed elegance is a Dhong signature, and it's an approach he doesn't abandon in the kitchen. The sleek gray cabinetry and marble countertops give it understated luxe, while the bright-yellow Marais barstools and kromy ikat fabric in the sunny breakfast nook add youthful pops of energy.

And because it's the living space of a young family, the designer wasn't shy about bringing in playful pieces to add whimsical notes, including a goat-legged stool and a faux-bois chair. "I call it my 'Hansel and Gretel' chair," Dhong notes. "Mixing things up makes a space more authentic and beautiful. The old brings gravitas to the new, and the new brings a certain freshness to the old." It's a pairing that brings out the beauty in both. ■