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THE POWER OF RESTRAINT

REIMAGINING A CALIFORNIA COTTAGE WITH A LIGHT, AIRY TOUCH.

BY JOAN TAPPER PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM BARTSCH



Pale tones contribute an atmosphere of serenity to the living room of a renovated cottage in Montecito. The owner retained the footprint of the home but changed all the doors and windows to integrate indoor and outdoor living.



In the sunset's mellow glow, a stone patio and a formal reflecting pool provide a focus for entertaining outdoors.

THE COTTAGE THAT Lee Kirch bought in Montecito had many of the elements she wanted. It wasn't too big. It had only one story, and it was conveniently close to the village. All it would take, thought the longtime jewelry designer, was a simple remodel to give it some charm. As so often happens, however, it turned out that some structural elements were not up to code, and in order to brighten the kitchen and add a feeling of lightness and air throughout the home, the job turned into a gut renovation.

Kirch wasn't daunted. She had redone more than half a dozen houses over the years in Colorado and Montecito and sold the properties, some complete with furnishings. "I only kept my books and my art," she says. In this case she worked with owner and founding partner of Santa Barbara's Mosaic Architects (mosaicarchitects.com) Jane Snyder and general contractors Giffin & Crane (giffinandcrane.com) to infuse the house with her own style and the California penchant for bringing a feeling of the outdoors inside.

Kirch kept the footprint and the limited number of rooms—two bedrooms and two and a half baths—but she changed all the door and window openings and bumped out the kitchen and the master bath, bringing the interior space to about 2,300 square feet. The living room already had a beamed ceiling, but she turned a large dated bay window into a squared-off window seat and changed the dark wood floors to wide-plank bleached oak.

She also had a new palette and aesthetic in mind. "All the houses I've done were French country style," she says, "in warm tones of

beige, cream, ivory, and yellow. I was tired of that. I wanted this to be cleaner and less fussy, with more of a Gustavian Swedish feel. I found pieces at Montecito's William Laman and Country House Antiques." A trip to Santa Barbara Stone turned up a beautifully veined piece of black marble that was perfect for the powder room.

For the living room furnishings, she had seating custom made in Los Angeles and covered in antique linen. Only a cherished coffee table, with its aged marble top, harks back to her earlier French country décor.

The same neutral color scheme prevails in the dining room, where an antique secretary dominates one wall. In the master bedroom a green Swedish dresser provides a pop of color. The iron four-poster bed in that room was also custom made, in Texas, Kirch notes.

The kitchen underwent the most dramatic transformation. "We vaulted the ceiling," says Snyder, "and added tall windows, a dormer facing the mountains, a fireplace, and a cupola over the island to flood the room with light. For the counters and island, Kirch chose a gray soapstone but left it unsealed to preserve the soft hue.

Kirch "landscaped the property as an extension of the interior," says Snyder, creating a garden that's all green with just a bit of white. It takes a person who's very restrained to do that." The greenery looks good all year long and provides a backdrop for entertaining, particularly in summer when guests move easily from the kitchen to the patio.

There's no question about Kirch's favorite spot: "I pretty much live in the kitchen," she says. "It's a very comfortable house." ♦



THE KITCHEN UNDERWENT THE MOST DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION. "WE VAULTED THE CEILING," SAYS JANE SNYDER.



The kitchen (above) is the heart of the house, illuminated not only with stylish lamps but also with natural light that flows through the cupola at the top of the newly raised ceiling. The gray soapstone that covers the central island and counters adds contrast to the neutral walls and cabinets, as does an oriental carpet, which also provides restful softness underfoot. Left: Surrounding shrubbery has been trimmed for a sculptural look.



Treasured volumes line the entrance to a hallway, punctuating the subject of the painting on the wall—an old-fashioned bookshop.



The simplicity of the powder room leaves the emphasis on the color and interesting veining of the black marble vanity.



A Swedish chest of drawers reflects the Gustavian aesthetic of the home's furnishings and brings a rare accent of color into the master bedroom, which includes a mix of textures among its prevailing neutral palette. The custom-made iron four-poster bed defines its space with spare, clean lines.