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Paradise Remodeled

A Tree Grows in Pacific Grove

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLI ULDALL



*S*ometimes people mistake it for a bed & breakfast inn. Perhaps that's because it sits on "B and B Row" along Ocean View Drive in Pacific Grove. Maybe it's because it looks like it goes on and on, this imposing yellow house that is deceptively compact. It could be because it's yellow.

Jack and Elizabeth Martin bought the dual-house property long before they actually lived there, enjoying it as a pied à terre when in town from "paradise," also known as Big Sur.

"Our place was 3,500 feet up and four miles down a dirt road on 94 acres," Elizabeth says. "We made our own electricity and took water from the spring. There was no one around for miles. But my husband got too old for it; you have to be young and hearty and self-sufficient to live that kind of life. So we sold the place and turned our attention toward town, to our property in Pacific Grove."

If they were really going to live there, both houses had to go. But the tree had to stay. Mostly because the City said so. And mostly because somebody had called it historic. And mostly because it was there first.

Natural Design: Carver and Schicketanz Architects designed this Pacific Grove home around a Norfolk Pine tree, while taking advantage of spectacular Monterey Bay views.



But mostly, it was in the way. Smack dab in the middle of the property, this Norfolk Pine had taken up residence long before there were two little houses, now weathering on this corner lot overlooking the Monterey Bay.

If anyone could work around a tree to design a fitting home for an elderly man and his agile wife, it was Mary Ann Schicketanz. Half the pair at the helm of Carver + Schicketanz Architects, a Carmel firm noted for sustainable design in architecture and interiors, the Austrian-born architect brought a European sensibility plus Pacific Grove practicality to the house.

"Designed in true 'village style,' it looks like three cottages," partner Rob Carver says, "but it is actually one continuous house, which is part of the reason a house of this size works on a corner lot in Pacific Grove. Plus, it had to be built around a historic tree that remains in the center of the property. It won a city council award."

The new place, which appears huge from the street, is only some 2,000 square feet and houses just two bedrooms. Built on an economy of scale, every inch appears carefully planned and artfully executed to make the best use of space and offer an ocean view from nearly every room.

"Mary Ann did a wonderful job with what she had to work with," Elizabeth says. "She created an interior courtyard around the tree and built the house right up around it. And this business of staggering windows to take advantage of the view, she thought of everything. So sincere and



Little Big House: Elizabeth Martin's Pacific Grove home is only two bedrooms and 2000 square feet, but appears much larger thanks to jutting out windows and an interior courtyard.

straightforward, she knew what she was doing. I would trust her with absolutely anything."

The Martins had sold their Big Sur property completely furnished, leaving Schicketanz to appoint their new home, staging each room to work with her interior architecture.

"Jack and I realized," Elizabeth says, "that this house was our big opportunity to throw caution to the wind and just let it happen. We thought, wouldn't it be nice to let Mary Ann pick out everything. I never knew what anything cost until I got the bill. And I didn't collapse. There was wonderful freedom in that."

The living room, framed by a bay window above a custom couch, is flanked by a wall of cherry cabinets, shelving and a writing desk, an ideal nook from which to watch sailboats on the bay. The same wood accents the kitchen, its warm tones carried out in dining room chairs and a low, square coffee table Elizabeth

once questioned but now loves.

The carpeting and upholstery blend soft golds and moss greens, colors picked up in the kitchen cabinets, washed with moss green and accented with a touch of salmon in smoked glass cupboard doors with silver cufflink knobs.

Above granite countertops drop three pendant lights in amber glass, a stunning complement to the sculptural chunk of ancient amber framed and hanging on an adjacent wall.

"My art is all meaningful," Elizabeth says. "Each piece is from the friend who did it or the friend who gave it to me. This is not the place to have expensive art, this setting where the sunlight is so penetrating and things fade. I'm happy to view such art, but I don't have to have it."

Schicketanz's color palette continues to influence the aesthetic throughout the house as green slate flooring, subtle against the burnt-red front door, fills the entry and continues down



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the hall. Shades of moss and salmon enliven the downstairs bedroom as well as the master suite, accessed atop a carpeted stairway or the cherry-paneled elevator installed to facilitate Jack's ascent.

"The elevator is the *pièce de résistance* of the house," Elizabeth says, "and it was very helpful to Jack, who got to enjoy the house for a couple of years before he died."

Another indulgence is a secret room, located across a rooftop deck that once housed a hot tub for Jack. Today, it is Elizabeth's office, her hide-away with a daybed for dreaming, and images of France, another paradise the couple enjoyed during 46 years of marriage, and to which Elizabeth still returns regularly.

"I have no idea how certain things come into our lives or why they do or where we'll end up," she says, "but I have learned to trust what comes." ■



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