

# Western Interiors

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AND DESIGN



# WARMING TREND

A SOOTHING COLOR  
PALETTE AND CLEAN  
LINES COMPLEMENT THE  
STRAIGHTFORWARD  
PLAN OF A MILL VALLEY,  
CALIFORNIA, HOUSE BY  
MATTHEW LEVERONE







previous pages: "Integrating the clients' traditional tastes into a house with modern lines was our goal," says designer Matthew Leverone, who was hired by Caron Stapleton and Robert Phillips to remodel their residence in Mill Valley, California. A photograph by Rick Chapman dominates the family room, where a Saarinen side table sits near a custom A. Rudin sofa, covered in Holland & Sherry fabric and paired with armchairs from Michael Berman. The lamp is by David Weeks from Ralph Pucci. opposite: In the living room, Leverone created shelving on each side of a sleek fireplace for the homeowners' first-edition book collection. A leather ottoman—flanked by custom sofas and a Pierre Chareau-inspired Macassar ebony bench—anchors the space. right: A Louis Poulsen PH Artichoke chandelier is suspended above a DessinFournir dining table surrounded by Christian Liaigre-designed chairs from the Holly Hunt Collection. The artwork is by Fraser Taylor.



**NINETEEN NINETY-NINE** was a wild time in the San Francisco Bay Area. The real estate market glowed red-hot, and stories abounded of desperate buyers, fueled by the dot.com boom, who were placing multiple bids on substandard properties for half a million dollars over the asking price, often on the very day the properties came on the market. Into this environment plunged Caron Stapleton and Robert Phillips, two young attorneys with two small children and no room for their growing book collection. "It was the beginning of the frenzy, and we had to move out of the city," explains Stapleton. "We bought this house, though there was nothing special about it. The deal for me was that I got to hire Matthew."

Stapleton had been exposed to Matthew Leverone's work when he was design director for Wheeler Design Group in San Francisco (he has since established his own firm, Leverone Design). With twenty years of experience in high-end commercial, retail and residential design on both coasts, Leverone, she knew, could transform her Mill Valley house and give her the look she sought: "minimal but very warm."

The couple knew they wanted to remove existing faux Tuscan elements such as the arches in the living area, the terra-cotta treatment around the fireplaces, and the oddly shaped columns. "And because the house was run-of-the-mill," Stapleton notes, "I was hoping for some drama—just a little drama!"

"We saw that these people had really good taste and an interest in art," Leverone recalls. "We thought it would be a fun project for us to tackle. The house is so simple architecturally, I thought the furnishings should relate to that." He produced elevations and sketches, and the clients chose one of three color schemes he presented. The result is a warm interior with clean lines and the quiet, ordered serenity they had hoped for.

The living room, dining area and family room share a palette of warm yellows and greyish blues, with dark wood accents and neutral carpets. "The unified palette gives a flow through the whole house," Leverone says. He introduced notes of color on some walls and designed shelving and display niches with downlighting to accommodate the couple's collections of first-edition books and pre-Columbian artifacts. He reframed and grouped their art, such as the six black-and-white photographs from Rick Chapman's Circle series in the entry hall.

Though Stapleton and Phillips hadn't intended to replace all the furnishings, the small-scale furniture from their Victorian flat did not translate well to their Mill Valley residence. "They were great clients because they were open to doing different things that worked with the architecture of the house," says Leverone.

In designing the living room, Leverone explains, "I didn't want it to be all modern, edgy furniture." The custom Macassar ebony bench, invitingly upholstered in mohair from Beacon Hill, was



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left: "Playful elements such as simple white frames with children's photos and the lively linen curtains add whimsy to the breakfast and family-room areas," says Leverone. A Boyd Lighting pendant is centered above a custom table on wheels, which is surrounded by benches covered with Ted Boerner fabric and Kravet Ultrasuede accents. below: In the study, books and collectibles are displayed in a California Interior bookcase. A Herman Miller chair is paired with an antique table, which the couple used in their former dining room.



**THE FURNISHINGS SHOULD RELATE TO THAT," SAYS LEVERONE.**





**opposite:** "We wanted a comfortable, relaxing retreat for the master bedroom," says Leverone. Prints from De Sousa Hughes hang above a California Interior bed. "White elements freshen darker wood accents," notes the designer. A side table with a tubular stainless-steel base and a lacquered satin-finish top echoes a lamp from the owners' collection. **above:** Ikea straw pillows, doubling as a side table, combine with a Smith & Hawken lounge chair to create an ideal spot on the master-bedroom porch for taking in Mill Valley views.

inspired by the designs of Pierre Chareau. It creates a sculptural element that is "interesting and architectural," notes Leverone. A floor lamp with a round base from Stephen McKay and an over-size leather-covered ottoman soften the room's hard edges.

For the dining area the designer and his clients chose a large round table with curved legs from DessinFournir and Christian Liaigre-designed Harry dining chairs from the Holly Hunt Collection. The large Louis Poulsen PH Artichoke chandelier doubles as an arresting conversation piece. "At night when it's lit and the light filters through the leaves, it's really beautiful," says Leverone. As for the carpet, he adds, "We wanted to do something really neutral on the floors, something that would just blend in." Two cream-colored sisal rugs anchor the living room and dining area, while a thin-stripe custom rug accents the family room.

Open to the kitchen, the family room and eating area are "sophisticated but kid friendly," says the designer. Leverone designed the large square table—"a hearty worktable that can stand up to paint"—and put it on rollers. For flexible seating, he created upholstered benches with washable covers. The pendant from Boyd Lighting "brings the eye down," explains Leverone.

The family room's seating area is centered on a striking Rick Chapman black-and-white photograph of Muhammad Ali's hands. Saarinen's pedestal side table for Knoll Studio can easily be moved so that the children have room to play. The block-printed linen window-shade and drapery fabric from Galbraith & Paul, says Leverone, adds a note of grace and looks lovely at night.

Similar color tones are carried, with some variations, not only into the study, where the couple's antique dining table found a new calling amid rare books and artifacts, but also upstairs into the master bedroom, where the windows look across Tamalpais Valley to steep green hills. "Traditional elements were combined with clean, modern lines in the master bedroom," says Leverone. A metal-base side table is set next to a custom mahogany bed frame with an Ultrasuede inset. Osborne & Little pillow fabric of varying-colored circles adds a geometric note.

Stapleton and Phillips's new house couldn't be further from the frenzy—dot.com or otherwise. "Matthew is a really great editor," says Stapleton. "He has a very distinct vision."

"It's not in-your-face design, but it works really well," says Leverone. "It's a very serene space." +