

THOUGHTS OF HOME: A SINGLE MOM FINDS SOLACE IN AN OLD HOUSE

House Beautiful

DECORATING KITCHENS WITH STYLE

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**FABULOUS KITCHEN
MAKEOVERS
& HOW TO DESIGN YOURS**



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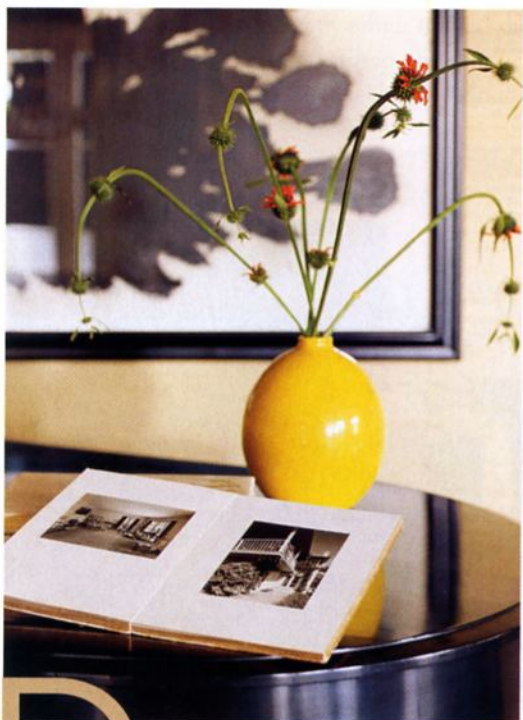
PERFECT PROPORTIONS

A midcentury California classic is lovingly restored and furnished with pieces from each of its seven decades of history



Clean geometries predominate in the room, where a Mies van der Rohe daybed works perfectly with the Edward sofa and Circle2 coffee table from the De Sousa Hughes Collection. Painting by Ed Moses.





This page, clockwise from upper left: A striking collection of yellow urns from J.F. Chen in Los Angeles dominates the entrance hall. The front facade of the house. A 1960s gold-plated and crystal chandelier hangs above a walnut Holly Hunt Tonneau Table. Painting above piano is by Donald Sultan. Opposite: A 1940s Jean Royère cabinet under the stairwell holds a Milano lamp by Nancy Corzine.

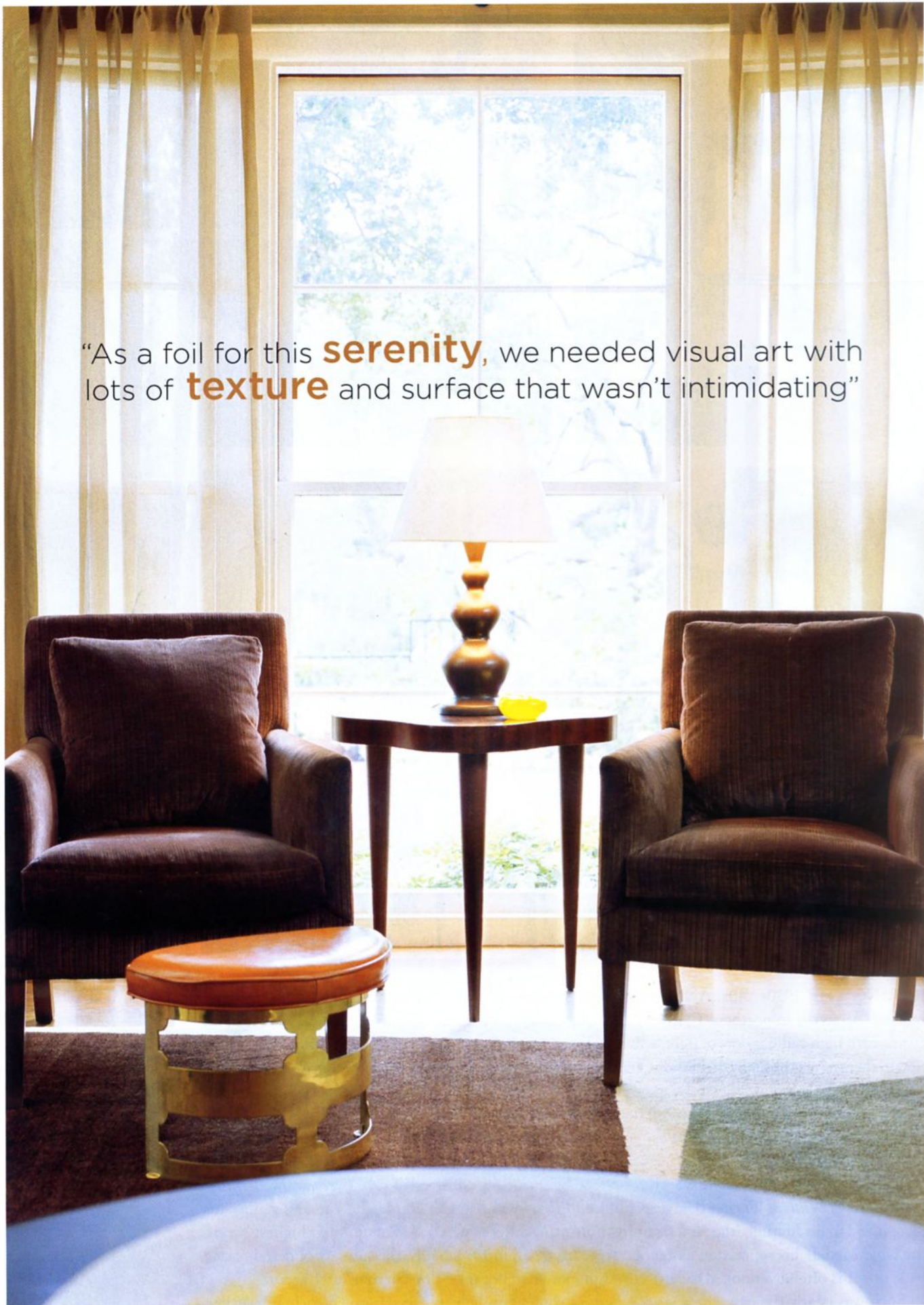
DURING THE 1930s, '40s, AND '50s, William Wurster built what he liked to call "large small houses," primarily in northern California's Bay Area. His pioneering designs created flexible interior rooms with high ceilings, lots of light, and easy access to outdoor living spaces. Rather than draw attention to themselves through ostentatious materials and adornment, the houses were conceived as frames for views of the surrounding landscape.

Wurster constructed more than 200 homes and, even during the Depression, business boomed. In 1945 he was hailed by this magazine as "an architect whose work has already had a powerful influence on the American scene."

His elegantly restrained style is aptly described by the title of Marc Treib's *An Everyday Modernism: The Houses of William Wurster* (University of California Press, 1995). But though Wurster's genius was recognized in his lifetime (the American Institute of Architects awarded Wurster their highest honor, the Gold Medal), his reputation has ebbed since his death in 1973. Sadly, the subtlety of detail prized by Wurster is often overlooked today in favor of more flamboyant, "Look at me!" architecture.

Such was nearly the case a few years ago for a young family who had outgrown their Edwardian

“As a foil for this **serenity**, we needed visual art with lots of **texture** and surface that wasn’t intimidating”



Right: A 1940s Italian mercury glass chandelier in the dining room. Below: Painting by Richard Pousette-Dart above a 1950s Tommi Parzinger sideboard. Opposite: A 1950s brass and leather stool from Grosfeld House next to Jermyn chairs from Holly Hunt.

three-bedroom apartment overlooking San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge and had begun house-hunting in suburban Piedmont. Famous for its tree-lined streets and excellent school system, Piedmont also boasts some extraordinarily impressive homes that date from the Roaring Twenties, when it purportedly had more wealth per square mile than any other city in America and was known as the City of Millionaires.

Set amidst such gaudy splendor, a Wurster home built in 1937 seemed a bit, well, lackluster.

"It was considered avant-garde in its time, yet at first glance that was a little hard to understand," admitted the wife who, though an active volunteer at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, hadn't heard of Wurster back then.

"The house seemed unusually simple to me," she continued. "It's surrounded by mansions built in high Tudor or Colonial style but, in comparison, didn't feel like it held its own."



Not helping matters, of course, was the neglected condition of the 6,000-square-foot structure. Floors throughout needed to be replaced, each of the four and a half bathrooms had dry rot, and a woebegone kitchen sported blue paisley wallpaper.

Unlike his wife, the husband was already familiar with the architect's name from his undergraduate days at UC Berkeley, where the College of Environmental Design is named Wurster Hall. And, since he works in commercial real estate, he recognized an undervalued piece of property.

Happily, after the family moved into the six-bedroom house in 1997, things they hadn't noticed right away were gradually revealed. For instance, the house was filled with sunshine, since windows along its entire rear overlooked a backyard garden designed by Thomas Church, who frequently collaborated with Wurster. They began to appreciate, too, the tall ceilings and doorways, as well as generous hallways that were far more than mere passages. Decorating, however, proved a challenge, as the architecture's austerity demanded respect.





"The rather basic-looking facade of the house is deceptive," says Geoffrey De Sousa of De Sousa Hughes, who was hired to design the interiors. "Once you enter the front door, you're in a grand front-to-back foyer that is thirty feet long and twelve wide. The interior proportions are just perfection."

As an homage to Wurster's timeless vision of modernity, De Sousa combined furnishings from each of the house's seven decades of history, including a 1940s Jean Royère commode, a 1950s Tommi Parzinger sideboard, and a dining room chandelier from the 1960s. "My clients wanted a decor with as much longevity as the house itself," he explains.

Chocolate brown walls in the entryway and solid fabrics for upholstery and curtains provide a sublimely low-key backdrop for a dazzling collection of contemporary art.

"I love Geoffrey's work because it is so clean and highlights the sculpture of furniture," said Michelle Bello, an art advisor who consulted with De Sousa. "As a foil for this serenity, though, we needed visual art with lots of texture and surface that wasn't intimidating. I think the results reflect the vibrancy of this energetic family."

Wurster, who was ever-mindful that true luxury doesn't have to shout, would doubtless be pleased.

"Architecture is not a goal," he wrote in 1956. "Architecture is for life and pleasure and work and for people. It is the picture frame, not the picture." ●

Mark English Architects and De Sousa Hughes collaborated on the kitchen renovation. They chose Calacatta marble for the island top and painted the walls in Benjamin Moore (# 2167-30) Harvest Moon. Custom Halophane & Nickel Pendant Lamps are from Ann-Morris Antiques in New York. Chairs are from Design Within Reach. Custom table by De Sousa Hughes bisects the kitchen island. For more details, see Resources.