

# A life of travels, showcased at home

By [Anh-Minh Le](#)

December 23, 2015 Updated: December 23, 2015 12:39pm



Photo: David Duncan Livingston

The kitchen.

During their more than two decades of marriage, Sherri Wood and her husband shared four homes in San Francisco, each furnished with “significant input” from him, she notes. When he died in 2014, as the next chapter in her life unfolded, she found herself surrounded by decor that didn’t align with her aesthetic.

“My husband was tall and he loved bold color,” says Wood, a retired banker.

“The furniture was large in scale and mostly in strong patterns or colors. I wanted my home to reflect my calm, serene nature. I wanted my art and travel mementos to take center stage — to generate curiosity for guests and memories for me.” Over the past 20 years, Wood has visited 113 countries across all seven continents.

Wood enlisted interior designer Cecilie Starin, who recalls: “My vision was about bringing a global sensibility to the whole interior and creating interests through contrasts and textures.”

In the living room, a wall that previously featured plain white shelves now sports a custom arrangement of staggered shelves painted in Benjamin Moore’s Black Bean Soup. The shelves are backed with a grass cloth by Thibaut and showcase Wood’s travel keepsakes.

One of her most prized possessions occupies the top right corner: “If there was a fire, I would take the wooden female carving,” says Wood. “We purchased her on our first trip to Kenya — walked into a large multiroom gallery, saw hundreds of pieces and knew she was the one.”

A close second, as far as favorites go, is another carved wood artifact displayed in the upper left. “We bought it on another trip to Africa,” says Wood. “To me she is an homage to a Grecian torso, except she has lovelier curves.”

Since the living room’s built-in shelving and coffee table are composed of dark woods, Starin created a visual counterpoint with the Hickory Chair sofa and two armchairs upholstered in lighter tones. The main injections of color in the space come courtesy of accent pillows and art (including a Guy Diehl painting above the fireplace and a Tom Lieber work on the wall, both from Dolby Chadwick Gallery).











Photo: David Duncan Livingston

Image 1 of 4

Cecilie Starin Nob Hill close up2. Noe Valley remodel by SF designer Cecilie Starin. Photo by David Duncan Livingston

The neutral palette continues in the den, which also functions as guest quarters. A focal point is the four-panel screen behind the sofa bed. “This was purchased in 1998 in Hong Kong by dear friends,” says Wood with a smile. “When they brought it home it didn’t feel right for their home. We were able to buy it and set it up in different ways in three of our homes.”

In Wood’s bedroom, the Cowtan & Tout drapery and pillow fabric was the jumping-off point for Starin’s design. “I immediately fell in love with the fabric — the contrast of linen with the silk, the aqua color which reminds me of the sky,” Wood says. “When I lie in bed, the drapes blend into the sky and the silk embellishments are clouds.”

Two ceramic hurricanes — purchased by Wood’s mother when the family lived in Japan in the early 1950s — were reconceived by Starin as bedside table lamps. And she introduced an additional element that brought Wood back to her roots: a gilded 19th century Japanese screen, from the Meiji period, that the designer sourced from Antique & Art Exchange.

“I spent four years in Japan as a little girl; in fact, learning Japanese as my first language,” Wood says. “The screen and hurricanes remind me of life in a quieter, slower time.”

Having lived in the redesigned Nob Hill dwelling for a few months now, Wood describes “two distinct moments I go through almost each day: when I awaken and look out the window and see the peach of the sunrise; when I walk into the apartment and am greeted by the entry and a glimpse into the other rooms,” she says.

“I am filled with gratitude — for being able to live in this city, to live in a beautiful apartment that reflects my style, and for having been to so many parts of our globe. To me, all of these emotions are reflected in the interiors that Cecilie and I created.”

*Anh-Minh Le is a freelance writer. E-mail: [home@sfchronicle.com](mailto:home@sfchronicle.com)*





Photo: David Duncan Livingston

Bookcase in a home remodeled by SF designer Cecilie Starin.

### **Decorator's cheat sheet**

Interior designer Cecilie Starin says that when it comes to decorating with travel relics, the only rule is to “pick things that interest you visually or conceptually about the culture you are visiting.” Here’s more advice:



**Shop like a local:** “Indigenous and handcrafted items can keep a collection from screaming ‘souvenirs.’ If you only have room in your suitcase for one thing, a box, basket, mask, vessel or sculpture can work well displayed all by itself.”

**Creating impact:** “For collections, I like smaller objects such as writing utensils, shells and even manufacturing devices — cigar molds or wood blocks for printing, for example. If you have a number of them, they do not need to be expensive or precious to make a statement.”

**Frame up:** “Framing can elevate practically anything to a work of art. It could be a traditional frame for things that are flat, or a three-dimensional frame — like a Plexiglas box or shadow box — which is a great way to showcase items that are not flat.”

**Give it a lift:** “For a museum-like presentation, place your keepsake on a base or pedestal. Wisteria.com sells a couple of clean and contemporary pedestals, as well as marble and glass risers.”

**Second chances:** “Repurposing old finds can give them new life. In Sherri’s home, for instance, we turned ceramic hurricanes into lamps; the same can be done with vases. Or transform a plate into a clock with a simple clock kit.”



**Anh-Minh Le**

Freelance Writer