



: transformed

Movie star

A vintage bungalow with a Hollywood past reveals interiors designed for contemporary living.

by MEG MCCONAHEY photography by PAUL DYER

WHEN THE MOVIE CLASSIC “American Graffiti” plays at Sonoma’s Sebastiani Theatre, cheers often erupt at a small scene where cool dude John Milner, played by Paul Le Mat, finally sheds annoying tween Carol (Mackenzie Phillips), who has been riding shotgun in his hot rod, crimping his style. Carol pops out of the iconic yellow ’32 Ford coupe, heads up the walkway of a classic bungalow, and disappears behind the front door.

Locals cheer because, to longtime Sonoma residents, the house is a familiar address, a fixture on Sonoma’s Second Street East since 1909. But when Cherie and Keith Hughes bought what some call “the American Graffiti House,” they didn’t know of its movie past.

If you watch the movie now, you can still recognize it. It doesn’t appear to have changed much since director George Lucas filmed the movie 45 years ago. But that classic Craftsman face is a facade. Behind the door — the same front door Mackenzie Phillips entered in the movie — is an elegantly modern home with an open floor plan.



Christopher Chung

Pulling off the transformation was no easy feat. The circa-1909 home sits within Sonoma's historic overlay district, where strict guidelines apply to protect the character of the old neighborhood. That didn't discourage the Hugheses from taking on the challenge not only of navigating Sonoma's strict design review process, but of restoring a home that structurally needed a lot of work. For one thing, it didn't have a real foundation. And once some of the walls were opened it became clear that earlier remodels had left some timbers in precarious shape.

Cherie, a retired child psychologist who now is co-president of the board of directors of the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, and her husband, Keith, are no strangers to Sonoma life. In 2000, they bought a vineyard property above Glen Ellen and dove happily into the life of grape growing and winemaking. But in recent years, they yearned to move into town. "We were very, very happy to find this home. We lived up in Bennett Valley but we were really involved with Sonoma. We were constantly driving up and down the hill. And when we had the opportunity to buy this house because of the location, we were thrilled to do so," says Cherie.

The house sits on Second Street East, which, like D Street in Petaluma and McDonald Avenue in Santa Rosa, is one of Sonoma's grand old residential streets, lined with charming vintage homes and only a short walk from the Plaza. The property had another great selling point. It came with a half-acre of land, a barn, and room for a pool and guesthouse.



Homeowner Cherie Hughes [top left] and her husband Keith maintained the charm of their 1909 Sonoma bungalow but expanded the rear of the property into a modern house. The original front porch now features a pair of couch swings, which have become a favorite place to relax.

The couple's team of architects, designers, and engineers restored what was salvageable from the 1909 house — including its welcoming face with big porch and Craftsman pillars — while modernizing it for 21st-century living. Architect Luke Wade of Wade Design Architects in San Anselmo, who had done such a pitch-perfect job restoring the Williams-Sonoma building on Sonoma's Broadway, helped the couple walk the line between respecting the property's long history and modernizing the interior. "We had seen his work and he's so incredibly brilliant and engaging," Cherie says. "He's a holistic architect and not just into pretty design." Among his ideas was the set of powder-coated

aluminum louvers installed over their patio. He studied the pattern of the sun throughout the year, placing them in a way to provide dappled sun no matter the time of year.

Cherie says part of the reason for the renovation was to enable the couple to age in place. So although there are additional bedrooms upstairs, they created a luxurious master suite on the main floor, deep in the back. The couple left the original front parlor, a cozy spot with a vintage fireplace. Beyond that front room, the house is a vision of open modernity, with crisp interiors by Jennifer Macdonald of Jennifer Robin Interiors in Marin.

Finding spaces for their art collection

The original front parlor features a grouping of armchairs instead of couches. In the new living room, a TV above the fireplace disappears behind a painting when not in use.





The full-service chef's kitchen is contemporary in style, with stainless steel lower cabinets flanking the range. A span of contrasting wood cabinets conceals the industrial exhaust hood. Across from the range, a large island contains a sink and more storage. Streamlined, contemporary furniture keeps the overall look light and airy.



was a major focus for the couple, who host fundraisers for the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art at the property, including a “Great Spaces, Great Places” event this past fall. Two places in the house feature hidden televisions behind a work of fine art. These devices feature a painting that, via a remote control, will flip, to reveal the television.

Concerned about making the home as sustainable as possible, they used reclaimed materials when feasible, for both furnishings and interior details. The former barn in back proved to be beyond repair. But they built a new one just like it to serve as a garage and kept the old-vine wisteria that had been growing there. A former chicken coop was turned into a guest cottage, equipped with a battery-powered unit that feeds off a solar electric system to provide an off-the-grid refuge if they ever need it.



Channel-tufted armchairs in the modern dining area. Below, a new backyard patio and pool anchor the home's more contemporary facade.





Clockwise from top: In the Hugheses' new living space, large glass walls slide completely open to access the patio and pool. Right, Cherie Hughes repurposed a bright red vintage elevator, complete with its original accordion-style metal door, as a garden shed. The new contemporary landscape features a tight grid of pavers.

Sources

architect

Wade Design Architects
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landscape architect

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interior designer


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builder

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The back garden is another place where recycled finds take center stage. One of Cherie's prized rescues is a vintage metal elevator that had once been installed on the outside of the house. After rescuing it from the barn, she had it painted and turned it into a garden shed for landscape supplies.

The couple also places emphasis on quiet places to stop and reflect on the seasons. Even the front porch is equipped with a classic swing, explains Cherie – “so we can watch the world go by.” 



Christopher Chung