



RIDING the WAVES

To make the most of a stunning setting high above the Pacific Ocean, a couple put a fresh California spin on the ideal of Mediterranean seaside living

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In the great room of a Dana Point, California, home, which was designed by Bob White of ForestStudio and decorated by M. Esie Design, the chandelier and wing chair upholstered in Belgian linen are by UCCA Studio, and the cocktail table and sofa in a Loro Piana linen are custom made. The walls and fireplace are of marmorino plaster, the painting is by Victor Hugo Cayen, the abaca-fiber rug is from FJ Hakimian, and the flooring is French white oak by Exquisite Surfaces. **FACING PAGE:** The terrace, which is shaded by canopies of woven willow and canvas panels, overlooks Salt Creek Beach and the Pacific Ocean. See Resources.



It all started with a good day at the office. The way the wife tells it, her husband came home from work one day in 2006 in a particularly buoyant mood. The epitome of a self-made man, he had started as a box boy at a major supermarket chain, worked his way up to vice president in charge of its largest division, and then left to form his own sales and marketing company. Soon, with the help of his wife, the firm grew to employ 30,000 people. Now, having just sealed an especially big deal, he blurted out, "Do you want to move?" "No," was her quick reply, before she surprised herself by adding, "Unless it's on the water." He told her to go ahead and look.

She is a native Californian, and he had moved west as a child. For 30 years they lived happily about a mile inland from Monarch Bay, in Laguna Niguel, a hilly town in California's Orange County. Still, the Pacific had always beckoned. When she started house hunting, it wasn't hard for her to find, if not her dream house, her dream location: a sheer bluff directly above Salt Creek Beach, a legendary surfing haven in nearby Dana Point. The view was jaw-dropping, which, in effect, was why the property and the gutted house on it were for sale in the first place: With scenery this stunning at stake, neighbors can get prickly about construction projects and preserving their own expensive views, and local review boards have been known to drag out

the approval process in the hopes of wearing down would-be builders. That's exactly what had happened with this property. The exhausted owners finally surrendered and put the place on the market.

When the couple bought it, they "inherited" the sellers' architect, Bob White of ForestStudio. White had also designed decorator Mary Lynn Turner's house in Ketchum, Idaho, which appeared on the cover of *ELLE DECOR* in December 2010. Coincidentally, the couple owned a vacation home in Sun Valley. They went to see Turner's place, fell in love with it, and hired Turner and her daughter/partner at M. Elle Design, Marie Turner Carson, to handle the decor of the new house.

But first came three years of haggling about the height of the roof. Even White, whose mellow designs reflect his personality, was reaching his limit. At one review-board meeting, he recalls, "I wanted so much to stand up and say, 'Unless you pay a front-row price, you don't get a front-row view.'"

The couple were drawn to Mediterranean architecture—their travels have taken them from Dubrovnik to the cliff-top village of Èze on the French Riviera—and after what seemed like umpteen trips back to the drawing board, White's eureka moment came when he saw photos of a flat-roofed house in yet another Mediterranean locale: Ibiza. He persuaded the clients to abandon their quest for a pitched red-tile roof,



In the study, the custom-made club chairs and ottoman are upholstered in an Ashbury Hides leather; the side table is by Jansen Home, and the copper lanterns are from Bianca Antiques; a flea-market armchair covered in a Holly Hunt leather sits beside a circa-1840 gueridon; and the vintage rug is Turkish. **FACING PAGE:** A pair of 1950s chests by Baker flank a custom-made cedar door in the entry. See Resources.



The kitchen banquette is covered in a Holly Hunt linen, the table is custom made, and the armchairs are by Lucca Studio. The chandelier is from Kristen Buckingham, the shades are of a linen by Paolo Textiles, and the beams and ceiling are reclaimed barn wood. **FACING PAGE**
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The front steps are limestone, and the plantings include sea purslane, lavender, and clipped rounds of weeping fig, pink cissampelos, and philodendron. Custom made light fixtures, a custom bar stool, and a work by Robert Marnett are in the entry. The kitchen cabinetry and island are custom made, and the antique light fixtures are Belgian. See Resources.

An iron pergola with retractable canvas shades provides protection from the sun on a terrace facing the ocean; armchairs by Michael Taylor Designs have cushions covered in a Perennials fabric, and the flooring is reclaimed terra-cotta pavers. **FACING PAGE:** The table and cabinet in the dining room are custom made, the chairs are by Berkshire Home & Antiques, and the 18th-century Italian chandelier is from Lucca Antiques. See [Resources](#).



and the design finally passed muster. The result blends old-world rustic charm—a whitewash-and-stone exterior, wood beams, shutters—with California beach house cool. “The home is long and linear, so it embraces the coastline,” says Carson. “We wanted to make sure the house embraced you as well. We wanted it to be calming.”

Set just 12 feet from the cliff’s edge, the one-story house feels, Turner says, like it is floating on the sea’s waves, and the decorators capitalized on that sensation with a palette of serene blues, greens, grays, and creams. For the living room sofa, they turned a Loro Piana stripe inside out to subdue the vibrant hues. This is SoCal, after all, so the decorators also took their cue from the wife’s favorite “house movies”: The ebonized dining chairs are a nod to Meryl Streep’s in *It’s Complicated*, while a striped runner down the long central hall echoes Diane Keaton’s living room rug in *Something’s Gotta Give*.

The couple are doting grandparents, and making the house welcoming to their four grown children and nine grandchildren—who range in age from two to 20—was of paramount importance. “She wanted this casual California elegance. She didn’t want anything to be too precious,” says Carson of the wife, adding that there were also practical concerns. “She was like, ‘We need more beds!’” Amazingly, Carson and Turner managed to configure one of the bedrooms to sleep six, fitting in a queen-size bed and two sets of custom bunks.

Still, sophistication was never sacrificed. The floors are elegant French white oak and limestone, and the restrained modern art is by the likes of Robert Motherwell and Andy Warhol. The decorators took a playful route in the master bath, selecting four color lots of marble and then laying them in a random pattern, what Carson calls a “non-checkerboard checkerboard.” The walls throughout the house



are hand-troweled plaster, emphasis on the “hand.” “Those old buildings in Provence aren’t perfect,” White says, and it was those tiny imperfections he was after. “I would go to the guys doing the work and say, ‘I want to see your hands.’”

The wife loves to cook for her big family, and the team warmed up the large kitchen with a buttery limestone wall and a ceiling covered in reclaimed barn wood. The island is topped with an enormous slab of Calacatta marble. The client says she had to let go of her fear of staining it and come to terms with the fact that “these are old materials out of the earth. I don’t think we should be too worried about it.”

The landscaping reflects the interior’s palette, with olive trees, lavender, and succulents. “It’s soothing, like the inside,” says the client.

Concerned that the flip side of having a lot of big windows to grab the views would mean a hot, glary interior, White designed two shady spots. Outside the master bedroom, a trellis of woven willow branches filters the light into graceful shadows. A pergola with retractable canvas panels softens the sun pouring into the living room. “When the wind is moving, you get a slight clattering of canvas and all the fittings,” White says. “It sounds like you’re on a sailboat.”

The clients are so happy with the outcome that the wife is even nostalgic for the weekly design meetings. It’s no wonder that the once-obstructionist neighbors now leave notes telling the couple theirs is the most beautiful house around. The most important critics are on board, too: Awed by the setting, one granddaughter asked if it was even legal to live there. “I wonder sometimes if it is,” admits her grandmother. ■



Armchairs by Gloster surround a wrought-iron table by C.J. Peters on the dining terrace; the pergola is made of iron and willow-branch panels. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** In the master bedroom, the headboard is custom made, the linens are by Frette, and the 17th-century bench is Swedish, as are the circa-1880 bedside tables; the armchair is by Holly Hunt, and the rug is by Country Swedish. The bunk room’s beds and cabinetry are custom made, and the oak floors are by Exquisite Surfaces. See Resources.