



REFINED RUSTIC DONE RIGHT

For a client's forever home, Cynthia Spence conjured an understated, elegant haven.

By Sophia Markoulakis // Photography by Drew Kelly

Personal trainers like Barbara Blackburn do more than just get you in shape—they network and introduce you to designers like Cynthia Spence (cynthiaspencedesign.com), who specialize in creating beautiful living spaces within tight timeframes. “While I was training with Barbara, I was in the process of remodeling my Los Gatos condo, and I was telling her how displeased I was with the way things were going,” says the client. Soon after, he and Spence sat down to determine if they were a good fit.

Fast forward less than two years, and not only did Spence help this newly retired

business owner remodel and sell his condo, she also helped him source and design his forever home. Spence says of her bachelor client's initial penchant for tall vases with sticks: “He does what most men do when left to their own devices. Every piece of furniture was black leather and the space was filled with linear vases.” Yet, after four hours at the San Francisco Design Center, according to Spence, he turned to her and said he had so much fun that when they were done with the condo he wanted to buy a house and redo that. He ultimately purchased a 5,000-square-foot place in Monte Sereno. CONTINUED...



From top: Pipe legs on the kitchen island add an industrial feel to the space; Cynthia Spence collaborated with Paul Ferrante on the dining room chandelier's design.



Clockwise from left: The master's sliding door, which replaced a small window, leads out to one of five patio areas; the powder room includes a bronze vessel sink, Phillip Jeffries wallcovering and Walker Zanger porcelain floor tiles; large-scale art and lighting greet guests in the airy entry.



...CONTINUED “We undertook a complete gut [of most of the house], and I had a hard stop to move him in by the end of November,” she says of the tight six-month timeframe. “He told me he only wanted to move in with his clothes and toothbrush.” The three-bedroom, 3 ½-bath sprawling home, which sits on an acre of flat landscaped space with a redwood grove, was severely dated, but Spence saw the potential. And by this time, the client and the designer had developed a friendship, which allowed him to let his guard down and really hone in on his aesthetic. “I think we exhausted every earth tone, including rust, his favorite color,” says Spence, of the intensive discovery that a warm rustic and elegant vibe was the perfect look for his new retired life and style. “He knew he was going to do this once in his lifetime, and he wanted to do it right. This wasn’t a vanity project for him. He wanted his own little piece of heaven.”

Going from an in-town condo to an expansive property was easy for the homeowner. “What he was really craving was space,” says Spence of the latter’s large open plan. By taking down walls, Spence was able to design two seating areas and a corner office area. Throughout the home, rustic is married with modern technology. The living room—which features natural

finishes like a reclaimed beam mantel and Jerusalem stone-clad fireplace—is fully wired with a Crestron system and a 75-inch flat-screen. For a cinematic experience, there’s a projector, surround sound, automated blackout shades and a drop-down screen. Through sliding barn doors is the formal dining room. The homeowner gave Spence free reign to curate special items like the global textiles and objets d’art that fill the open shelving here, as well as in other rooms. “I didn’t have a chance to do a lot of collecting during my business years, and I wanted to start over,” he says of the items procured at L.A.’s Pat McGann Gallery.

More natural elements are on display in the kitchen, including lots of raw wood and tile. Open shelving is highlighted with custom brackets designed by Spence. “I wanted the texture of the tile to show through,” she says of the Walker Zanger limestone squares that have a rough plaster treatment. The caramel-flecked Calacatta marble counters came polished, but Spence honed them. The kitchen island is knotty alder, planked together, and Spence had it planed so that it would feel uneven. “The construction of that island is the guiding principle behind the design of this house,” she says. “Everything is singularly unique and everything has an artisanal feel to it.” ■

