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THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

FEBRUARY 2011



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California dreaming: an elegant estate overlooking the vineyards of Napa Valley

February



In the foyer of Steven and Claire Stull's Napa Valley home, Richard Beard of B.A.R. Architects created the stair using balusters by Rocky Mountain Hardware. The credenza, in the style of Jules Leleu, is from Guy Regal. For details see Sources.

Point of View

B.A.R. Architects and the Wiseman Group collaborate on a hilltop home in Napa wine country

TEXT BY CAROL MITHERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN



Designer Paul Vincent Wiseman arranged Ralph Pucci sofas back to back in the living room; the Maison Jansen low tables are vintage, and the silk carpet is by Mansour Modern. Vintage Italian mirrors and Han dynasty amphoras flank the fireplace; a Dale Chihuly ceiling sculpture adds a punch of color.



WHEN VENTURE CAPITALIST Steven Stull and his wife, Claire, a former interior designer, decided to move from New Orleans to California's Napa Valley, they fell in love with a view. It was a serious stunner—from the

40-acre site 1,000 feet above the Cabernet-producing district of Stag's Leap, they could see mountains, vineyards, and even San Francisco, almost 50 miles away. "The minute we set foot here," says Claire, "we knew this place was for us."

But designing a house around a seductive panorama is more complicated than it seems. A hulking hilltop behemoth will wreck the landscape for everyone below; a glassy cliff-hugger might feel more like a lookout post than a home to its residents. The Stulls, who wanted warmth and a human scale, asked Richard Beard of B.A.R. Architects and designer Paul Vincent Wiseman of the Wiseman Group, both based in San Francisco, to study the options. They did—and made a counterintuitive choice: Instead of charging toward the view, they stepped away.

Beard placed the Mediterranean-style residence well back from the hilltop's edge, creating a foreground of gardens and terraces, and he masked the view from the driveway, so it would unfold gradually for arriving visitors. The house is only one room deep, a design decision that fills the interior spaces with natural light and provides contrasting glimpses of sky, craggy mountains, and the endless green of the valley floor. "A huge panorama seen all at once is a one-liner," Beard says. "By capturing the variety of what's out there and revealing it carefully, the experience is much richer." >



Miyak etageres by Therien Studio. Workshops and a sofa and chairs covered in Bergamo and Rogers & Goffigon fabrics, respectively, provide a contrast of textures against walls painted in a creamy Benjamin Moore hue. The Paul Evans chrome-plated cocktail table is a 1970's design. OPPOSITE: The trellised loggia and limestone terrace.



ABOVE: Paintings by Lockwood de Forest hang above a buffet by Jean de Merry; the dining chairs are by Madeline Stuart, the silk-and-wool rug is by Beauvais, and the limestone floor tiles are by Walker Zanger. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The kitchen is designed for serious entertaining, with Mark Albrecht leather counter stools and a Wolf range.

Sliding glass doors open onto a trellised loggia, and the limestone floors transition smoothly to textured bluestone pavers, blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor living. Warm, sunny Napa Valley encourages the latter. The couple's favorite morning spot is outside the family room; small dinner parties take place near the pool; and for larger events they set up tables on the wide lawn. "We *love* the outdoors," Steven says. "There are different sides and nooks, so no matter which way the



wind is blowing there's always some place outside where it's calm."

Wiseman oriented the residence's rooms inward, which makes them cozier. "Everyone rushes to the windows at first, but you need to have something to do at night when the view goes dark," he says. "Each major room has a fireplace and somewhere comfortable to sit and talk."

He and Claire, a hands-on client, collaborated closely on the decorating. Virtually all the furnishings were newly purchased,

though this was not entirely by choice. In the seven years that passed between the Stulls' acquiring the property and the house's completion, the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina inundated the first floor of their New Orleans home, destroying many of their antiques and other prized belongings. "But we were lucky compared to many people we know, who lost everything," Claire says. "After you see how much people suffered during Katrina, you let go of possessions and move on.">





ABOVE: The master bath features marble from Walker Zanger, Kallista bath fittings, and a Murano Nevada chandelier by Barovier & Toso.

ABOVE RIGHT: A neutral palette prevails in the bedroom, with a C&C Milano linen bedcover and curtains of Holland & Sherry's Glacé wool, automated by a Lutron HomeWorks system.

Napa Valley was to be a fresh start for the couple, which had been their aim all along. "From the beginning Steven and I knew we wanted the look of an older home that had been completely renovated inside," says Claire. The Stulls' exuberant Dale Chihuly ceiling sculpture and crisp, modern furniture—including a striking Paul Evans cube table and a pair of Maison Jansen brass-and-resin low tables, all from the 1970s—reflect Claire's taste and provide a contrast with the home's rustic exterior. "It's



exciting when a client with a strong vision takes you somewhere you otherwise might not have gone,” says Wiseman, who had originally imagined a far more traditional interior.

The biggest surprise of the house is its secret wine cave and adjacent terrace, accessible through a hidden door in the game room opened by a thumbprint-recognition button. (Claire jokes that her husband loves gadgets.) An elliptical stone staircase leads three stories down to a cellar used for stowing a 2,000-bottle

wine collection—a small vineyard on the property produces hobby Cabernet—and for casual entertaining. Doors open to a terrace not visible from elsewhere in the house.

The terrace, of course, offers its own portion of the knockout vista. “We appreciate it every day,” Claire says. “The view is glorious and always changing, and we are constantly looking at each other and saying, ‘How beautiful is *this*? Can you believe we actually live here?’” □