

Balancing Act

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Suzanne Tucker*

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A couple from different cultures and parts of the world relied on designer Suzanne Tucker to establish a balance that pleased them both

SUZANNE TUCKER FOUND the perfect project. For her clients in San Francisco, the second home she has created for the husband and wife couple, she was allowed to do what pleases her most professionally.

"I'm passionate about architecture, and so, for me, to take a home down to the studs and build it back up again is just heaven," she says from her San Francisco office. "It's a wonderful privilege for a designer to be able to start with a completely blank canvas. I brought in everything for this project and we gutted the entire place down to the studs."

For this undertaking, a spacious apartment in a highrise building, Tucker was able to fuse her sense of style and knowledge of design with her clients' tastes and interests. This ability to synthesize elements from dissimilar cultures into a cohesive whole might be one definition of the ancient Chinese philosophy known as yin and yang.

The homeowners—he, from South Africa, she from Singapore—needed a pied-à-terre for themselves and their two children to use on weekends and for business entertaining. Tucker describes the collaboration as satisfying on several levels. "These are treasured clients," she says. "They both love design, they love the process, and they really cherish their homes. It's really just the dream scenario for any designer. It was great fun to bring in all the cultural aspects that lend such history and energy to the rooms."

Yin and yang references how conflicting or opposing forces like light and dark can actually complement one another, a dualism that gives rise to a unified oneness. It's a good lens through which to view this home that is infused with striking sculptural features and a blend of Asian and African motifs—kuba cloth and white jade; zebra skin and vases of lotus pods. Yin and yang also underpins the success of the design firm of Tucker & Marks, in which its two principals play to their differing strengths (Tucker's

husband, Timothy Marks, serves as CFO and Project Manager).

There are specific challenges to working in a highrise where spaces can be reconfigured but not expanded. During the construction phase of any such project, events must be choreographed and work can only take place during certain hours. Elevator access has to be coordinated, and deliveries strategically scheduled. As Tucker says, "You can't temporarily set something out on the lawn. Everything must be carefully timed in a way that you don't have to consider when working on a house."

Even with the emphasis on the special materials Tucker used throughout—walnut floors and paneling in the library, bleached walnut in the kitchen and bark paper on the dining room walls—the designer says, "You still just can't compete with those fantastic San Francisco views. The challenge, however, is that you also have to work with the light, and you get some very gray days in this city. The interior can't be too gray, otherwise the home can feel cold."

Stepping off the elevator, the visitor enters a chic, modern space paneled in sycamore maple, welcomed by a Chinese "good luck" cabinet in red lacquer, a prelude

Opening pages: The foyer of a spacious San Francisco apartment is defined by a Chinois sideboard, custom-designed mirror by Tucker & Marks, and a cloisonné jar lamp from Daniel Barney. The space is lit with a pendant by Paul Ferrante. The adjacent entry hall is painted with Benjamin Moore's White Rock. The marble "knot" floor is designed by Tucker & Marks. Right: The dining room is illuminated with a Murano glass and brass chandelier. The dining chairs, upholstered in leather from Moore & Giles, surround a custom mahogany dining table by Dessin Fournir.



“This is definitely a melding of my clients’
two cultures and of various elements
that resonated with both of them.”

—Suzanne Tucker



Above: The living room features a Tucker & Marks–designed sofa, upholstered in a cotton/linen fabric from Suzanne Tucker Home. The lounge chair by Therien Studio uses a Buttercup-hued fabric from Majillite. The fireplace surround is made of wood onyx. The custom Sugar Cube sconce is by Blackman Cruz. Right: A Formations table in the living room is set with chairs by J. Robert Scott, upholstered in textured leather from Edelman Leather.





The master suite's Tucker & Marks custom walnut bed is fitted with bedding by Samuel Scheuer Linens. The swivel chair, a Michael S. Smith design, uses Holland & Sherry fabric. A Fortuny ceiling fixture features a decorative bowl and-pierced metal collar. The walls appear painted but are covered with a silk covering from Stark. The bench at the foot of the bed is custom by Tucker & Marks in a bronze finish by Paul Ferrante. Right: The hallway leading to the bath is painted with Benjamin Moore's White Rock. The vanity is set with a dining chair upholstered in a faux leather by Majilite.

*"We began with no floor, no ceilings.
For me, that's a design privilege."*

—Suzanne Tucker

to the inlaid marble and onyx "love knot" pattern on the floor of the entry hall. Tucker explains that the design of the rooms themselves evolved over time. "In the dining room, that Murano chandelier I found in Paris came first. It's made from plumes of gilded Venetian glass in the shape of leaves or feathers and assembled in a way that creates a crown effect and provides a soft, beautiful light. I was holding my breath when it finally arrived and didn't fully exhale until it was unpacked and I was certain nothing had chipped." Tucker and her team also procured all the art for the apartment, including the Nathan Oliveira painting in the dining room—a winged figure rendered in warm nutmeg shades that Tucker feels establishes a kind of communication with the chandelier.

The apartment was designed to be flexible, with the round table in the living room an ideal place for breakfast, an intimate dinner, or a business meeting. Tucker used the same chair frames here that she selected for the dining room, upholstering them in a complementary color so the homeowners may add them to easily expand the dining table's seating capacity. "The living and dining rooms are framed and visible through the same wide doorway," explains Tucker, "and you read those spaces together as one. The chairs can be moved around as needed, and the repetition of that form—as opposed to a different one—creates a more serene, cohesive environment."

Tucker eschewed rugs, explaining that the homeowners preferred the cleanliness and the feel of wood and stone underfoot. "It's actually a shoeless house," says Tucker, "with a hidden closet in the elevator vestibule for all their shoes—and the shoes of their guests. And because there's that big view and so much light coming in, it's a wonderful way to play up the floor materials, which also reflect the light."

The furnishings and accessories in the public rooms suggest a gallery, but the mood subtly changes upon entering the master bedroom. Bathed in southern and western

light, it's a serene retreat from the city, rendered in rich, neutral tones of Devonshire cream and caramel—the visual equivalent of quiet. That soothing palette is carried into the bath, where the shower, like the living room fireplace wall, is lined in book-matched ivory onyx with vertical graining.

"When the apartment was gutted," Tucker says, "I looked at the solid, south-facing bedroom wall and said, 'Wait a minute; there was a window there. Why was it closed up?' It turned out there was no view in that direction, but I opened the wall back up to reintroduce the sunlight. That room gets beautiful sunlight all day long, and while you wouldn't normally put a bed in front of a window, it really was the wall where the bed belonged."

To minimize the unattractive view, Tucker custom-designed a leather-upholstered walnut bed with a sheer embroidered diffuser panel, then designed a window treatment with a hidden, remote-controlled blackout shade behind a pierced panel that replicates a grill pattern from an antique Chinese screen. She brought the pattern to a vendor with a computer-driven laser cutter that transformed blank panels of sheet goods into something remarkable—another element juxtaposing ancient design with twenty-first-century tools.

"As designers, I think there's always a certain psychology behind what we do, and in the case of this couple, it was definitely the *yin* and the *yang*. They have a kind of continental pull to both Africa and China, and yet they're very much Californians." Reflecting on the project, Tucker adds, "For me, the successful completion of this project was largely about listening carefully to fuse their interests and their tastes." ■

The San Francisco-based Suzanne Tucker is noted for her custom designs of furniture, including cabinetry, sofas, and chairs, along with flooring patterns, and decorative accessories that include mirrors.

