

LUSH LIFE

In Hillsborough, The Wiseman Group and landscape designer Stephen Suzman reinvent a timeless estate

By Diane Dorrans-Saeks Photographed by Matthew Millman

A vine-covered fruit tunnel shades walks and moments of repose beneath specimen pines and redwoods. OPPOSITE The loggia is scented with white and lavender wisteria, and Cécile Brunner roses.





In the heart of leafy Hillsborough stands a house whose luminous stone walls, soaring slate roofs and ravishingly beautiful rose-scented gardens are reminiscent of 18th-century classic gardens in the Cotswolds. Originally built in 1973 as homage to English country houses, this poetic residence has recently been restyled, updated and reimagined by The Wiseman Group. Witty and eccentric new decor shows off the owners' museum-quality 20th-century art collection.

It all began with a phone call after the new homeowners had acquired the landmark house, recalls Paul Wiseman. They had a few improvements in mind.

"Our firm's obsession is rare, one-of-a-kind and highly customized rooms, furniture, embroideries, decorative painting and beautiful textiles, so this was a dream assignment," says Senior Designer, Lauren Daley.

The designers immediately fell in love with the house and its distinguished feeling of history. "Our clients are very generous benefactors of all San Francisco cultural institutions, as well as of local garden clubs, and they're enthusiastic and adventurous travelers and lifelong connoisseurs of art," says Wiseman. "Their collection, particularly a series of vivid Milton Avery paintings, was a starting point for colors and furnishings for the sitting room."


Today, the living room is tranquil with dashes of chartreuse, orange, citron and emerald on exuberant pillows that seem to have wandered in from the flower garden. In the master dressing room, the designers created a magic world of antiqued mirrors, a nickel-and-parchment vitrine, a silk-and-wool carpet and two Knole chaises for repose.

It's the harmony between house and garden that is so striking. The owners are avid and knowledgeable gardeners who have traveled >>

Michael Taylor originally designed the soaring 52x26-foot living room, and The Wiseman Group lightened it with a pale wash of decorative paint; mossy silk velvet sofas seem to mirror the exteriors. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Classic English climbing roses on handcrafted tuteurs in the box-hedged rose garden. Specimen trees surround the residence.





Along the hall, shelves hold 20th-century works on paper. An all-white assemblage of porcelain and rare volumes in an upholstered bookcase behind the Knole chaise.  Bronze figure by Gaston Lachaise.



For the India-inspired bar, The Wiseman Group devised Moghul-style fretwork with laser-cut wood, painted by James Stancil, to mimic carved marble.



FROM TOP In the bedroom suite, a custom-crafted parchment-and-nickel vitrine displays jewels and Judith Leiber purses. Fortuny curtains and leafy carpet bring the garden indoors.

<< the world to study botanical treasures. Among their favorite landscapes are horticultural landmarks like Hidcote in the Cotswolds, which became inspiration for their own extensive redesign.

San Francisco landscape designer Stephen Suzman began his work on the oak-shaded grounds in 2000. Spread out over a park-like five acres, the garden had originally been planned by the great San Francisco landscape designer Thomas Church. Today, redwoods and oaks shelter a pool terrace and a new pool house/guest quarters. The English-style garden is a confection of white and lavender wisteria, pink and white rambling roses, cutting gardens, noble oaks and sweeping lawns. The scope now includes a redwood grove, kitchen plantings, espaliered fruit trees, a perennials border and a stone pine walk. Under Suzman's guidance, a swamp grove and quiet woodland gardens continue to flourish.

Given its location in prime San Mateo County, the Hillsborough house has an impressive lineage. The great California designer Michael Taylor, working closely with architect Angus McSweeney, created the house in the 1970s for Elaine McKeon, president of the board of trustees of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and her husband, George. With known passion for 18th-century English architecture and design, Taylor journeyed through the auction houses of London and the Cotswolds. He gathered inspiration as well as a trove of 17th-century linen-fold wall paneling and other extant detailing.

"I had great respect for the original Taylor interiors," says Wiseman. "For moral courage, I asked myself, 'What would Syrie Maugham or Frances Elkins do?' They loved the refreshment of ivory and white, so I've lightened everything up. I think they would approve." •



The powder room walls, cabinet and mirror, painted in a charming trompe-l'oeil style by S.F. muralists Evans & Brown, took cues from the iconic '40s stage sets of French artist Christian Bérard.