

The home's location on a point affords it some of the best vistas in Santa Cruz, while also exposing it to the region's sometimes blustery conditions.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

A Silicon Valley family finds bliss in a cliff-top retreat where the great outdoors—and the killer Santa Cruz surf—are always calling

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Far below the blufftop where this Santa Cruz home keeps watch, swells form and skate along the water's surface. Many crest at impressive heights—this is arguably a California surfing capital, after all—but peering out the home's wall-to-wall windows, the waves seem small in the context of their vast ocean setting.

It's not unlike the house itself, all 5,000 square feet of it dwarfed by a towering Monterey cypress that stands sentinel beside it, along with the expansive Monterey Bay and dramatic Santa Lucia Mountains in the distance. But according to architect Kathy Scott, principal at Walker Warner Architects in San Francisco, when you have a canvas as spectacular as this, the best thing might just be to let the location lead. "The idea was to be super understated and allow the landscape to be the dominant feature," she says.

Don't mistake understated for a lack of wow-worthy moments, however. A to-the-studs renovation of a formerly Spanish Mission-style abode, the home quietly impresses with its attention to detail, from the exterior that matches the moody feel on a foggy Santa Cruz morning to the interiors—by San Francisco designer Jon de la Cruz—that strike the perfect balance between casual and luxurious. "This is the place where the family comes to relax and have fun," says de la Cruz. "I wanted the interiors to reflect that." Here's how Scott and de la Cruz designed a modern, sophisticated escape where the idyllic setting plays a starring role inside and out.



WORK WITH WHAT'S EXISTING

While the former home, with its peach-colored stucco and barrel-tiled roof, was a far cry from what the owners envisioned, Scott still embraced some of its most prominent qualities, including low-slung hipped roofs and the overall footprint. Finding inspiration in midcentury California architect Cliff May, she complemented that with walls designed to maximize views at every corner. "It was really about creating these ribbons of wraparound windows and doors and then, when we went inside, vaulting and expanding the feeling of space," she says. As for aesthetics? Scott replaced the stucco with James Hardie board-and-batten siding painted a deep bronzy brown.

LET THE STARS SHINE

An ode to modern simplicity, the kitchen area (opposite) was outfitted with sleek white cabinets, open shelving, and a pair of token statement makers. "We tried to keep the house durable and simple, while celebrating really beautiful things, like the Pietra Cardosa countertop wrapping the island," says Scott. The white-veined stone countertops—a nod to the Northern California fog, says de la Cruz—provided the perfect contrast to the room's more rustic oak floors, chosen for their strength and ease of upkeep.

WINDOW SHOP FOR INSPIRATION

With the dining room's wrap-around views (left) as his guide, de la Cruz chose pieces that nod to the surrounding coastline. "You can see the wharf right outside the windows, so I incorporated things like weathered wood and rope that give a nautical feel," he says. In the corner, a window seat covered in hardy outdoor fabrics provides the perfect perch for watching the waves.



COMPLEMENT YOUR CANVAS

The living room's spectacular views might be the show stealer, but the space itself (above) is not without its wow moments. To enhance the room's open feel, Scott raised the vaulted ceilings higher and added beams for interest. "We called them ships' hulls because it feels like you're on the underside of a boat in this room," she says. From those, de la Cruz hung an oversize capiz shell chandelier from Restoration Hardware, and continued the casual-coastal vibes in the furniture with rope-back armchairs from Palecek and a custom sectional covered in vintage linen.

BREAK RULES FOR BETTER VIEWS

Because this coast can get blustery, a courtyard (opposite, top) is a logical place to escape. The home's former interpretation, however, was less than ideal. "It was really closed off from the rest of the house and a missed opportunity," says Scott. So the architect did something daring: She sacrificed square footage from inside the home to widen the courtyard's view through to the ocean via the front porch. "That was one of our big moves," she says. "You're not going to be able to sit on the oceanside all the time—it's just too foggy and windy—so having a chance to enjoy it from inside the courtyard was key."

GO NATIVE

Working around the property's towering Monterey cypress, the team—led by Redwood City, California-based Boxleaf Design—sought a landscape (right) that would tuck just as naturally into the rugged cliffs. Low-maintenance, water-wise plants and shrubs feel at home in Northern California; a treehouse the former owners installed in the branches of the lone cypress was rebuilt "to create a special place of retreat for the family's kids," says Scott.





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DON'T SAVE THE BEST FOR GUESTS

Originally functioning as a separate apartment, the home's entire second floor had similar plans for use as a guest suite, says Scott. "Then one day we walked up there and of course the pelicans were flying by, and the surfers were out, and everything looked so perfect," she recalls. "That's when we thought, 'What are we doing? This is amazing.'" The window-wrapped perch quickly pivoted to becoming the new main suite, with features like vaulted ceilings, a private deck, and a view-facing standalone tub (opposite). De la Cruz amped up the room's coziness with plush furnishings, including a hand-knotted wool area rug from Pejman Carpets and a vintage Steven Chase Amphibious sofa where his client "loves to sit because she can watch her sons surfing through the window," he says.



FIND NEW USES FOR OLD SPACES

With no need for the previous home's two separated garages, the design team opted to creatively transform the spaces to meet the needs of the family. The street-facing one became board and wetsuit storage for the avid surfing clan, while an extra detached garage (left) got new life as a recreation room for the kids, with Ping-Pong and shuffleboard tables and a "candy bar" tucked away in the corner. "I took the inspiration for this room straight from what the kids wear when they walk down to the wharf," says de la Cruz. A custom striped sectional pairs with an ottoman covered in cuffed denim, while a surfboard, oars, and colorful beachy artwork by Hawaiian artist Mike Fields reinforce the room's playful vibe.



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