

**WHAT  
MAKES A ROOM  
GREAT**

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

AUGUST 2009

**WHAT MAKES  
THIS ROOM  
GREAT**

DEEP, LOW SOFAS SAY  
COMFORT

THE STREETLIGHT  
FLOOR LAMPS

CORAL, BONE, FOSSIL  
AGAINST THE SOFT  
RUG

MONOCHROMATIC  
SHELF DISPLAYS

**THESE  
ROOMS  
ARE  
GREAT  
BECAUSE  
THEY  
BREATHE**

Tone-on-tone neutrals, lots of texture, and a fresh-air feeling for a house in Northern California

*Interior design by*  
ERIN MARTIN

*Interview by*  
FRANCES SCHULTZ

*Photographs by*  
LUCA TROVATO

A deft use of warm neutrals gives a glow to the living room of this Belvedere, California, house. Designer Erin Martin covered Dominique sofas from Verellen in a herringbone hemp. A hide-covered antique chair and Turkish rug add layers of texture, depth, and history. The coffee table, made of antique oyster sticks and limestone, is Martin's design. Lamps are from Lucca Antiques.

With well-placed objects and art, and effective lighting—skylights and antique French sconces—an awkward foyer is transformed into a graceful gallery. OPPOSITE: In the dining room, a mahogany heirloom was dramatically recast with a glossing of ivory paint. Its new blue interior perfectly sets off the white china. Cushions and seat backs for the Vineyard chairs from Ironies are covered in Carma, an embroidered fabric by Bergamo. Pipa Bowl chandelier is from Oly.



**WHAT MAKES THIS ROOM GREAT**

TONE-ON-TONE CHINOISERIE WALLS (WHAT A RELIEF!)

WHITE PAINT ON THE CHIPPENDALE PIECE

PENDANT CHAIR CUSHIONS, WITH EMBROIDERY

THE MODERN CEILING LIGHT (ECHOING THE FRETWORK)

**WHAT MAKES THIS ROOM GREAT**

ONYX COUNTERTOPS—IT GLOWS!

THE EXTRA-THICK ISLAND COUNTER-TOP, EDGED LIKE MOLDING

FURNITURE-LIKE CABINET FEET

NAILHEAD TRIM ON THE HOOD



**FRANCES SCHULTZ:** We're in the Marin County waterfront enclave of Belvedere, just across the bridge from San Francisco. A magnificent setting like this has to be inspiring.

**ERIN MARTIN:** Always. I love bringing the outside in and listening to the energy and spirit of the property and the house.

**And how does that translate to your design?**

I work in a neutral palette so that the art, and the people who live in the house, are the color. I want to create a calm, serene backdrop for the drama that life brings, 'cause it brings it, honey.

**Which white did you use to get this candlelight glow?**

I mixed it from Benjamin Moore paints. I usually do that. It's in my blood. Before I became an interior designer, I was an artist—I painted murals. Once I get the color right, I use it everywhere. Maybe in different values, but that's the color. There's something about the continuity that calms you.

**Did you paint those exuberantly patterned walls in the bedrooms and the dining room?**

No, Michael Duté did. He's a San Francisco artist. We had a good time with those walls. I said, 'Let's really go for it with gigantic scale and blown-up patterns, but keeping it tone-on-tone.' So it's subtle but still pretty crazy.

**You like big scale in furniture, too.**

For the most part, that's what I always do. That's one thing I love about the designer Michael Taylor's work. It just feels good. Your eye continues to move—it doesn't get stuck anywhere. Everything is similar, everything holds hands.

**It's very feminine, this place.**

The owner is a girlie girl. It was a challenge for me, because I'm not known for my feminine touches. But challenge is always good, and it was fun. We made the master bedroom really soft and sexy. She's an avid Francophile, and the fleur-de-lis motif on the wall—besides being French—is also very girlie.

**I love the contrast of stark and soft in the living room.**

**The cushy sofas and furry rug with the bone mirror and the rather rustic coffee table—what's that table made of, by the way?**

Limestone and reclaimed oyster sticks—from Belgium, I think. I like seeing things taken out of context, used in new ways. As far as the contrasts in the room, different textures and elements give a room depth and movement. Your eye constantly discovers something new. That sculpture at the end of the hall, for instance: it's by Simon Toparovsky, an amazing artist whose work is in the Met. He's also a friend. The stand it's on was the stand he made the mold on. I told him the only way I'd buy it was on the stand. I love that there's something raw and unfin-

ished beneath such a serious piece of art. Layering is always the key. I even put bead board on some of the ceilings to add texture. I'm all for a modern house, but dude, it can be so boring and cold.

**Somehow this is not a house where I expect to see a Chippendale bookcase, even if it is painted white.**

Argh, that big old honking thing had been in the family, and she wanted to use it. So I said, 'The heck with it, let's just paint it!' I think paint is the answer to *everything*. We gave it a face-lift, and made it fresh and young again.

**And then you juxtaposed it with that rather daring Oly light fixture in the breakfast room.**

If you're going to have a piece like that Chippendale, you've got to have something like that light fixture to balance it—to show you still know what's going on, like you're not stuck in a period. Plus, the shadows it casts are insane!

**There are quite a few skylights in this house.**

She's very into light. She likes things bright and cheery. I like light, too, but I don't like overheads. I don't like holes in ceilings. I like ambient light—lamps and candlelight.

**Can I use the word 'luscious' to describe the kitchen countertops? What are they made of?**

Onyx, and it really is beautiful. The light goes through it and it just glows. I'm a limestone-concrete gal, and I was nervous about this stone, but we fell in love with it.

**How does it hold up?**

People will tell you it's not for kitchens because it's soft, but look, you go to Europe and everything's beat to pieces and they don't care. We're not trying to make it look like a showroom. Let it have a life of its own. These counters will look even better in 10 years, when the edges are chipped. Chips and scratches give it character.

**And the top of that island—did it take 10 men to bring it in? It's twice as thick as the others.**

I hate when everything matches.

**What is your philosophy about collections?**

I love framed collections of anything. I like small things in big frames—it calls people to come up and study it. It doesn't need to be something important. On the wall in one of the guest rooms are a bunch of little crochet samples. I have a friend who collects soap from houses he goes to.

**You mean he steals the soap...**

Yes, he steals the soap. And he frames it, and it looks like ivory. It's wonderful.

**To exalt the humble and humble the exalted.**

Nothing is precious in our houses except the people who live there. So don't put too much energy into this stuff. Enjoy it, though, while you're here.

The kitchen's skylight enhances the luminous quality of the onyx countertops. Cabinetry is by Solid Wood Custom Cabinets. The nailhead design on the custom range hood is by Erin Martin; the built-in refrigerator is a glass-doored Sub-Zero Pro 48. Backsplash is glossy white subway tile by DaTile, from J&A Tile and Stone.



1



2



3



4



7

1. In the breakfast room, 1940s dining chairs surround an antique French table with a mirrored top. Jenny chandelier is by Oly. 2. A sitting room off the kitchen. 3. Beautifully detailed curtains and shades are the work of Valerie Johnson. 4. The owner's two nonchalant Labs stroll about, just outside the front door. 5. A mirrored wardrobe makes a small bedroom seem bigger. 6. Just outside the powder room's stunning alabaster, coral, and shell mirror, there's a grid of flea market prints, in the foyer. 7. A detail of the dining room's chinoiserie wall painting, by Michael Duté. OPPOSITE: A small guest room has major impact, with a tall headboard by Heidi Angell and a collection of framed crochet samples. Pillows and bed linens by Valerie Johnson.



61



6



5

“A bedroom should be comforting and enveloping, to soothe your day away and renew you. This is a soft, serene, feminine room: It reflects the energy of the owner.”

ERIN MARTIN



**WHAT MAKES  
THIS ROOM  
GREAT**

THE WALL-TO-WALL  
HEADBOARD

JUTE LAID WALL-TO-  
WALL

THE BEAD DETAIL ON  
CURTAINS

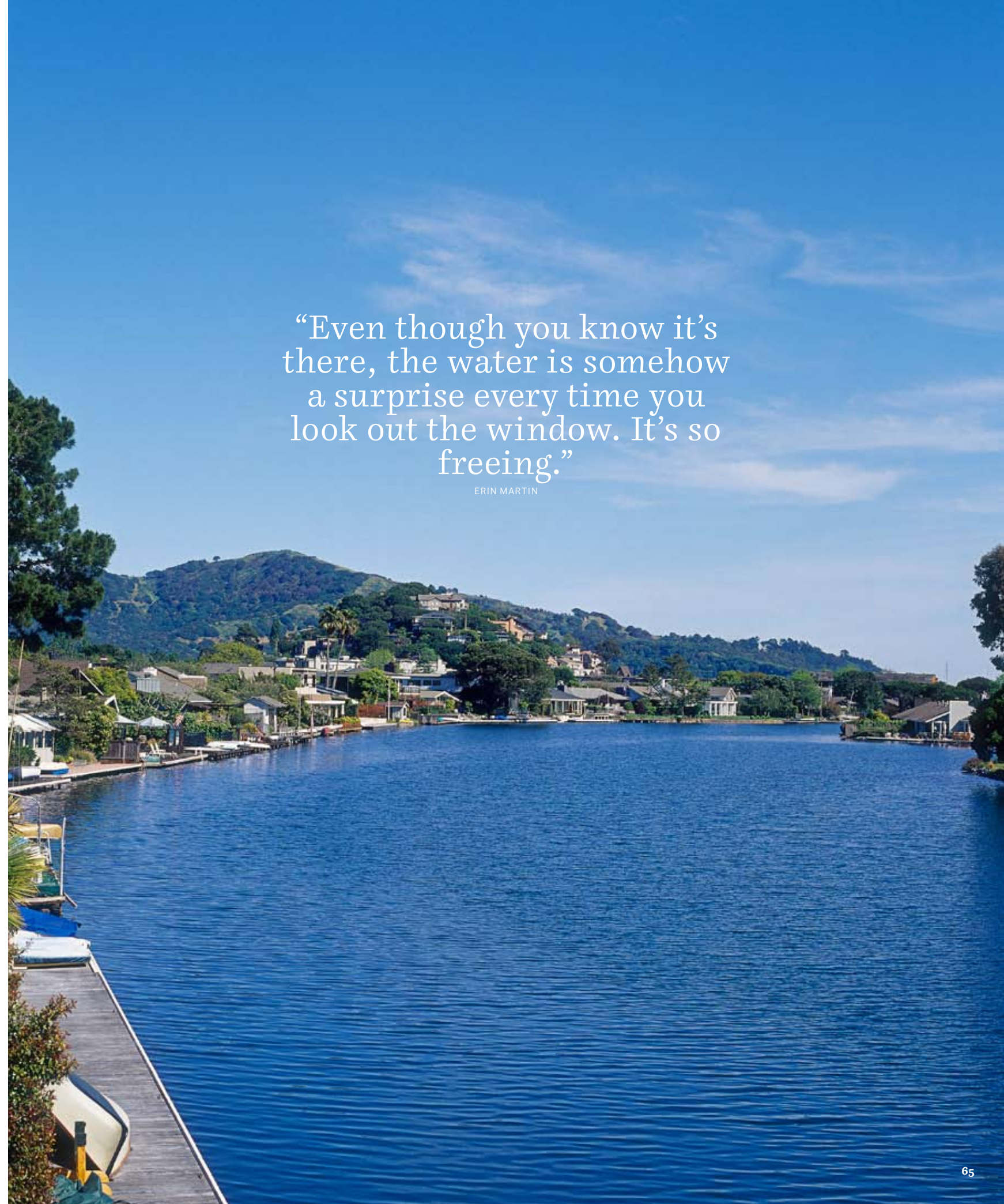
“WALLPAPER” THAT’S  
ACTUALLY PAINT

THE INFORMAL  
CHAISE SLIPCOVER

The master bedroom is a masterstroke of Martin's signature tone-on-tone approach. The headboard extends from wall to wall, evoking the plush stateroom of a yacht. Bed linens and throw pillows are by Valerie Johnson. The bedside table is an old monk's chest from Formations; the iron lamp is from Lucca Antiques. Walls by Michael Duté. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES



Talk about a room with a view! The master bath's trompe l'oeil tiles by Michael Duté frame the shimmering waterscape of Belvedere Lagoon (opposite).



“Even though you know it’s there, the water is somehow a surprise every time you look out the window. It’s so freeing.”

ERIN MARTIN