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DESIGN
San Francisco

A play

San Francisco Designer
Vernon Applegate
Designs A Potrero Hill
House To Showcase
Three Distinct Levels

of light

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Considering the different qualities of light on each floor of this San Francisco family home, designer Vernon Applegate created three distinct but coherent designs.

Starting with the ground floor family room of this three story home on Potrero Hill, Applegate, of San Francisco's Applegate Tran interiors, created three inviting floors that progressed from a sophisticated public space to a pared down cozy retreat.

"It's like peeling back layers as you move from one floor to another," says Applegate. "The light was very different in each area—it got lighter and lighter as you went up—but we incorporated recurring themes as you ascend."

One of those themes is the commitment to a clean, contemporary style that showcases the owners' collection of antiquities from Nepal and Tibet on the ground floor but also allows for a restful, antiquities-free, master bedroom on the top floor. Another was the warm but neutral color palette that varied in intensity between the floors depending on the natural light available.

"We used rich, earthy colors on the ground floor to warm up the dark interior space," says Applegate. "On the main floor there was more direct light available and so we lightened things up both with the colors and the nature of the furniture. By the time you hit the master suite, you feel like you're perched on top of a mountain with plenty of light so the colors could be even more subtle."

Applegate used a range of soft neutrals throughout the main living space but incorporated different fabrics on individual pieces of furniture to add depth and texture. "The scale of the rooms in this 1930s home is not grand," says Applegate. "Therefore, the furniture needed to be more on the petite side, and I didn't want any big blocks of color that would overwhelm the space."



The "Nazari" bench upholstered in mustard-colored pony hair, and the marble topped Prodigy side table are both from Applegate Tran's own furniture line. The bold graphic print used to upholster the David Edwards wingback chair keeps the focus in the room. "The large graphic holds it own with the dramatic view," says Applegate.





In the main floor living room, upholstered pieces by David Edwards featuring Cowtan & Tout fabrics in cream, cocoa brown, and light salmon surround a round multi-layer coffee table by A. Rudin. A pale ivory Tibetan rug from Dolma rests on the beautiful ipe wood floors. Soft draperies cover the wall between two large windows, emphasizing the view. And large paintings by Applegate's partner, artist Gioi Tran, glow softly on the off-white walls.


The dining room's cozy window seat banquette and chairs repeat the two-toned neutral upholstery of the living room furnishings, "again, to keep any one object from becoming too large," says Applegate. The open leg style of the chairs (also by David Edwards) and the curved table base create an open, fluid mood and break up the long, narrow geometry of the room.

On the other side of the dining room, the cobalt blue glass tile on the kitchen walls adds a depth and visual interest that pulls you into the room, says Applegate. "Even though blue is a cool color, here it adds a wonderful warmth to the entire design—it's the richest element on the whole floor."

Blue-grey granite and quartz countertops combined with an island top made of slumped glass shimmer above teak cabinets. Applegate opened up the kitchen to the rest of the space so that anyone working in the kitchen could converse with guests sitting at the table or even in the living room.

Upstairs, the light teal (Benjamin Moore's Ocean Air) master bedroom walls and the pale blue (Ice Mist) high pitched ceilings capture the feeling of being up in the clouds. "There is a lovely quality of light on this floor that we wanted to replicate in the design," says Applegate.

Furniture was kept to a minimum, with a built-in cabinet taking the place of dressers on one side of the custom made bed. A small writing table sits on the other side of the bed and a low bench rests at the foot. The persimmon bench upholstery and the deep red pillows on the bed and loveseat in the sitting area provide small pops of color.

"It can often be very foggy here so we needed the room to feel warm and inviting as well as refreshing and light," says Applegate. "It's a sophisticated but comfortable place to relax." 

ABOVE The open legs of the dining room chairs visually expand the relatively small dimensions of this 1930s dining room. Cobalt blue glass tiles from Ann Sacks on the kitchen walls draw visitors into the room.

OPPOSITE Splashes of red in this airy aqua colored master bedroom make it feel warm even on a foggy day. "No matter the weather, the quality of light in this room is so pleasant that we wanted the design to feel equally fresh, peaceful and tranquil."

