



OPENING UP THE FLOORPLAN AND THE VIEWS FROM THIS HILL-NESTLED HOUSE GAVE THIS COUPLE THE URBAN DREAM HOME THEY DESIRED.

**By Kathryn Loosli Pritchett**  
**Photos by Christopher Stark**

A striking fireplace wall, faced in metallic tile, is a focal point of the revamped family room.





The same 12" x 12" polished black tile by Geologica that faces the family room fireplace covers the walls and floor of the adjacent powder room.

When a new job opportunity brought Paula Groves and Johnny Hawthorne to the Bay Area, they wanted to capture some of the urban feeling of their former Boston homes in their new home. The newlywed couple was thrilled to find a loft-like house in the Oakland hills with a beautiful leafy view.

Unfortunately, the floorplan of their "lofty" home wasn't as open as they wanted and the windows didn't really capture the view. Besides, the interior space needed some serious material upgrades to become their dream home. Paula researched a number of Bay Area designers who specialized in contemporary design, but it was a serendipitous encounter with Vernon Applegate of San Francisco's Applegate Tran Interiors at the San Francisco Design Center that helped her settle on a design team, including Turlock-based contractor Jim Crone and San Francisco cabinet finisher Steve Baumans.

"I was browsing through a kitchen showroom and ran into Vernon," says Groves, a venture capitalist with roots in the Bay Area from her college days at Stanford. "I looked at his portfolio and what I saw made me think he could execute the loft concept we wanted."

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Applegate saw the potential in the project and knew that reworking the layout to place more emphasis on the kitchen, as well as extending the windows, would be the first steps toward realizing the home's potential.

"You entered the house on an upper catwalk that had tremendous views of the canyon, but then you walked down into a boxed-up living area with no views," says Applegate. "Initially the view wasn't incorporated into the rest of the house because the windows were all too high to look out from the floor level."

Extending the windows to the floor not only accessed the view, it also made the entire space seem bigger. Combining the narrow galley kitchen and small family room into one large kitchen space created a much more expansive feeling in the main living areas as well.

Outfitting the kitchen with high-end materials gave a luxurious lift to the entire floor. Cabinets made of double-cerused white oak with a horizontal grain set the color scheme and tone of the design. These dramatic cream-colored cabinets feature a black grain pattern that complements the Gammapar floors made of distressed oak in a variegated ebony- and caramel-colored stain.

Absolute Black granite was used for the countertops and to cover the central island. Combined with the rich oxblood color of the Red Dragon granite backsplash and the grey-blue painted walls, the kitchen provides a sculptural focal point for the whole floor.

In the adjacent living room, a classic black leather Le Corbusier sofa and chairs sit on a salt-and-pepper colored area rug. The original freestanding fireplace was recovered in gray ceramic tile from Ann Sacks. The dramatic dining area features the elegant "Fucsia" chandelier from Flos that hangs from the 19-foot ceiling over an Italian wood and metal

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In the living room, Le Corbusier chairs and sofa complement a fireplace recovered in sleek ceramic tile and backed by floor-to-ceiling windows.

table surrounded by white leather chairs from Crate & Barrel.

"Like most projects, this one turned out to be bigger than we expected," says Groves. "But we managed to stay in budget by occasionally substituting retail furniture that approximated more expensive custom furnishings."

Pieces from the couple's African art collection, such as the masks and textile art on the walls, ceramic plates in the kitchen niche and an unusual tribal chair that Paula picked up on safari in Kenya, were incorporated into the design. Along with contemporary paintings by Oakland artist Gwen McShepard and others found in their travels to Brazil, the artwork is shown to great effect in these gallery-like rooms.

"I really wanted a design that was contemporary but warm, and that showcased the things we love," says Groves.

The new family room off the kitchen is a good example of the comfortable contemporary style. Formerly a small, dark "extra" room, this space now features a striking fireplace wall of 18-inch metallic tiles with a cozy inset fireplace. On an adjacent wall, a small window was significantly expanded to let in more light. Across the way two support posts were enclosed to create an audio/visual wall that houses a large flat-screen television and speakers.

"Rather than have a cabinet unit that took up space, this wall holds everything while covering the structural posts," says Groves.

Applegate notes that the audio/visual wall also masks the large storage unit on the other side of a corridor that leads to an elegant powder room. "To create the family room meant taking away a lot of the existing storage, so we needed to add storage wherever possible," says Applegate.

The corridor cabinetry includes open bookshelves and display niches as well as closed cabinet areas that house Johnny's large collection of record albums. The "command center" closet between the kitchen and family room contains a number of audio/visual components, including a turntable for all those LPs as well as a state-of-the-art Escent digital media management system.

"The cutting-edge high-tech components flattered the contemporary design of this home," says Applegate. ■

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The contemporary lines of the dining table and chairs (right) contrast with the African masks and tribal chair in the family room (right).



