

At Home in the Wine Country

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN IN THE CALIFORNIA VINEYARDS



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Rustic Estate

“Those of us who work in the wine country are very influenced by the hospitality experience.”

— AMY A. ALPER, PRINCIPAL, AMY A. ALPER, ARCHITECT

Set in Calistoga, at the northern end of the Napa Valley, this rustic estate rests on a bucolic site surrounded by rolling California hills. It also occupies a place—directly in the path of the region’s 2017 wildfires—that is indelibly etched in the region’s recent history. Although the blazes destroyed all of the neighboring homes and several adjacent outbuildings, this nearly completed home was spared, saved by the existing patios, rustic stone base and standing-seam metal roof that ground the project in the site and define its rural ambience.

For the clients—Calistoga winemakers, community volunteers and empty nesters—the project began as a renovation. Working with Sonoma-based architect Amy Alper, they quickly determined that the existing house would not allow them to live on the land in the way they envisioned. They would start over and design the house anew, but not from scratch. The new 4250-square-foot home would be assembled within the site’s original meandering walls, integrating numerous existing site features: an outdoor fireplace and kitchen, patios and pool, all of which would remain.

Carefully working the site plan around the existing site elements, Amy wove together old and new to create an ensemble of forms of varying heights and materials. The result is a house that feels as if it has evolved over time, which is typical of a rural property. From the entry pavilion, the first impression is a layered view across the great room, through the fourteen-foot pocketing doors, across the terrace and ending with the stately outdoor fireplace.

The materials help tell the story of the house, marrying a contemporary sensibility with a rustic palette. Inspired by the stone of the existing fireplace, the architect clad the home’s three pavilion-like masses, which house the entry, kitchen and master bedroom, in native Napa Syar stone. To create a sense of development over time, she linked these three masses with walls of cedar in a board-and-batten pattern, and then drew the exterior materials inward to further define the interior spaces and create a textural connection between inside and out.

Layering is an integral part of the experience: the architecture is arranged to provide views through the spaces while the interior spaces, designed by Jennifer Robin, of Jennifer Robin Interiors, are a subtle ensemble of pattern and texture. Soft blues, hints of pattern in wallpaper and bathroom tile,



velvet pillows and soft carpets subtly counterbalance the building's more rustic finishes. The designer's consistent use of pure white—on walls, built-ins, sculptural light fixtures—is a particularly brilliant foil for the highly textured backdrop of stone and cedar.

"My goal with the interiors was to bring a sense of human scale and comfort to the spaces with texture and layering," says the designer. "I wanted to design with some drama, but the challenge was how to do this within a neutral palette and not detract from the surrounding landscape and views."

The great room is laid out in two zones: one to capture the view of Mt. St. Helena and the other focused on the television and interior space. Jennifer artfully linked the two zones with a double-sided chaise, using a mixture of antiques, varied textures and artwork to create a warm and welcoming space. A wall of white, customizable shelving highlights the owners' collection of art and artifacts.

Honoring the clients' request for a no-fuss kitchen, Amy chose to forego upper cabinets in favor of a wall of windows, designed a large island for gathering, and tucked an intimate built-in seating nook into the inviting space. Jennifer selected warm oak cabinets and reclaimed beams for their warmth and durable NuCrete counters as a hardworking alternative to marble counters (which were ruled out as impractical). She playfully alludes to those dreamed-of marble counters in the marble fabric covering the island pendants. Antique mirrored tile from Ann Sacks, used on backsplashes in both kitchen and dining room, reflects the views.

In what is perhaps the home's most impactful design element, Jennifer devised a horizontal pattern of soda-blasted oak paneling to cover freestanding walls in the dining room, master bedroom and guest room. The walls masterfully define the three spaces, drawing the outdoors in and adding a textured backdrop for other elements of the design. In the dining room, for example, a large table made of bleached reclaimed oak is surrounded by tan leather Roche Bobois chairs and is lit by a massive Avron white plaster pendant fixture from Bobo Interiors. This pendant is one of the designer's favorite pieces, and is a perfect complement to the oak wall that lies behind it.

This rustic retreat brings together the best parts of the wine country—old and new, modern and rustic, sophisticated but grounded in nature—and offers its owners a sanctuary from which they can witness the resilient wine country landscape recover and heal.

PREVIOUS OVERLEAF:
This house, designed by Amy A. Alper, Architect, with interiors by Jennifer Robin Interiors, weaves together old and new, rustic and sophisticated to tell an authentic story of living on the land.

OPPOSITE:
The materiality helps tell the story of the house, marrying a contemporary sensibility with rustic materials. Native Napa Syar, pulled into the interior, creates a bridge between the exterior and interior.





OPPOSITE:
In the kitchen, the architect chose to forego upper cabinets, instead ushering in the views. Oak cabinets and reclaimed beams are warm and inviting, while playful marble-print Rebecca Atwood fabric on the pendants alludes to wished-for marble counters replaced with more practical NuCrete.

ABOVE:
In the dining room, chairs by Roche Bobois pull up to a bleached oak dining table built by Statsky Design, topped by a massive white plaster Avron pendant fixture from Bobo Interiors, which pops against the horizontal soda-blasted oak covering the wall behind.



OPPOSITE:
A custom wall mural by Area Elements pays homage to the surrounding landscape, while hanging pendants from Urban Electric Company and bedside tables by Arteriors create an intimate sense of scale.

ABOVE:
One of the most distinctive elements of the interiors, a horizontal pattern of soda-blasted oak paneling covers free-standing walls in both the master bedroom and dining room. In the master bedroom, it provides a textural backdrop for the rattan bed; swing arm sconces by O’Lampia.

RIGHT:
A freestanding tub by Native Trails provides a perfect place to soak up the view.



RIGHT:
A view through the living room looks out onto the existing fireplace, outdoor kitchen and walls, which defined the site envelope for the new house. Artwork by James Lavadour—the client's own—lines the wall.

OVERLEAF:
A symmetrical view of the pool highlights the peacefulness of the bucolic site, characterized by rolling hills and the wine country's iconic oaks.



