



Spectrum of Color on Nob Hill

A San Francisco Setting

INTERIOR DESIGN BY
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
RUSSELL MACMASTERS

EVERYWHERE, Joseph Minton's design for a new penthouse pied-à-terre in San Francisco exudes the hue of candlelit honey, sprays of spring flowers blanket the hearth chairs. Even in the iron bedstead, pieces of rose quartz wink from the canopy corners. Through a soft exuberance of tint and tone, Mr. Minton was able both to embrace the personalities of his clients and to celebrate the city's characteristics they found most appealing.

"The designs I'd done for them in the past were very homey, even rustic," he says. "When they told me they wanted 'a little piece of San Francisco,' I knew the result had to be more urbane than anything I'd ever done for them, and still be warm."

Appropriateness as a private haven and sensitivity to setting can present themselves as separately as opposite shorelines; uniting the two successfully is the fundamental challenge in creating a pied-à-terre. Joseph Minton used color as his bridge.

"Usually I find an important piece to set the tone of the room," he explains. "But here we had to start from

Guided by his clients' love of San Francisco, designer Joseph Minton infused their Nob Hill pied-à-terre with a convivial spirit. Sunsets viewed from the Living Room inspired the palette used in the apartment: earth tones and pastels. The soft hues of an antique Samarkand rug are picked up in Lee Jofa needlepoint on the side chairs. A mineral specimen, part of the residents' collection, rests on a hocked-leg table.

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ABOVE: Since the Living Room lacked architectural detailing, the designer sought an appropriate piece to set a tone of elegant comfort. The result of his search was an antique Georgian-style mantel with flanking book niches. Victorian-era pine paneling, milled specifically to the room's measurements, glows with mellow richness. Bergères covered in a floral Clarence House cotton inject their own aura of traditional grace. *opposite*: In the Dining Area, the mirrored wall reflects a panoramic view of San Francisco, giving a feeling of openness to the small space. Carved armchairs clad in striped Brunswick & Fils fabric, and a banquette in Clarence House ribbed cotton provide cozy seating around a Karl Springer table. The pine cornice, surrounding both areas, is a unifying element in the décor.



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scratch, without any furniture to work around. I was with my clients in the empty apartment, trying to decide on our direction, and it was a bit disheartening. The floor-to-ceiling windows, meant to exploit the view, gave the place a feeling of sterility that contradicted everything I knew would be right for them.

"Then we all turned to look at the sunset over the bay, and one of the owners said, 'Let's bring in the colors of that sky, like it is right now.'"

So, with dusk as the palette, the designer daubed terra-cottas and rich pastels among the wallcoverings, drapery fabrics, rugs and upholstery. In every selection, he kept uppermost the need for comfort. The owners like "chairs you sink into, and with the cushions decorated so warmly, they're all the more inviting."

While coziness can arise from an amalgam of ingredients, the designer captured the necessary elegance in a single bold stroke—the fireplace setting. "The mantel itself and the flanking book niches are antiques I discovered on a buying trip to England," Mr. Minton says. "The surrounding pine is Victorian, milled freshly to the room's measurements." He chose a finish that let the color of the wood glow through—a natural complement to the prevailing mood of San Francisco in its heyday.

The resulting staidness is all the more striking in a room that once

threatened confinement. "Initially we faced some spatial problems," Mr. Minton says. "The apartment felt small, with two cramped bedrooms, space wasted in hallways, and more closets than were really necessary." But the clients, with a large extended family, needed to accommodate guests, at least occasionally. The designer solved the problem by eliminating hallways and unused closets, and incorporating two bedrooms into a single master suite. The key feature is a sliding partition between the sleeping chamber and sitting area. When the panel vanishes into the wall, matching interior treatments and shared views unify the suite. With the panel extended, the sitting area becomes guest quarters.

The designer's other major structural change was to raise the living room ceiling from a standard clearance to a height of over nine feet. He enhanced this alteration with another sky-inspired improvisation of color: He had the ceiling painted in a faint pastel shade drawn from the cast of a cloudless morning.

"If you had just come into the room," he says, "and were asked what color the ceiling is, you might say 'white.' But if you put a swatch of white against it, you'd see it has a definite blue-gray shift. The effect is to make the surface disappear, as the sky does above a clear landscape. The room then feels open and spacious."

Like the city itself, the apartment draws graces from around the world: woven fabrics from Italy, English woods and chairs from France. "I like to approach the final dressing-out of a room by mixing as many styles as are compatible," Joseph Minton says. "It should look as if it just happened."

Throughout the design process the owners made contributions that personalized the result. "We needed a bed, and commissioned designer Mimi London to do one for us. She patterned it after an ancient cup and a bracelet she had," the owners recall. "When we went to see how the craftsmen were doing with it, Mimi said, 'Oh, no, the finish needs more distressing—at least another thousand years.' And that's just how it came out." The owners, who collect mineral specimens, contributed the rose quartz adornments in the corners of the canopy.

Such touches display an openness to individual taste and flair that seems to embody San Francisco itself. "Recently," says one of the owners, "a friend and I decided to fly up for a few days. We wanted to visit the city and each other, since we hadn't been together for quite a while. We arrived at the apartment, and then never left it! We just sent out for more firewood, and curled up in comfort." To them, to be in this inviting apartment was to be in San Francisco. □

—Randall Wallace

A bed fashioned in sculpted iron dominates the sleeping area of the Master Bedroom. Botanical prints, a floral painted bedside table and striped millefleur chintz from Clarence House splash exuberant color throughout the room. Soft folds of Westgate cotton chintz drape the canopy, and a shimmer of pastel chintzes from Brunswick & Pils covers the pillows. Mr. Minton devised a sliding panel to separate this room from the sitting area, creating an extra bedroom for his clients' family and guests.

