

HOME

on the cover

Tom Hansen, a self-taught 'garden guy,' transformed a barren hillside at his Strawberry home into a lush garden with three terraces — one each off the home's kitchen, living room and dining room. CLARA LU / FOR THE ARK

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RUTH LIVINGSTON STUDIOS

Ruth Livingston's design for the bedroom of this Tiburon home features muted colors to create a calming space. On top of the side table sit two vases done by a German ceramic designer Livingston met years ago.

Custom pieces help create harmonious Tiburon home



Her clients wanted to keep their existing dining room table, but designer Ruth Livingston freshened up the room by creating custom dining chairs with a mahogany inset along the sides. The steel light fixture overhead was hand-forged on the East Coast.

By EMILY LAVIN
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Ruth Livingston says one of her top priorities as an interior designer is collaborating with her clients to determine exactly what it is they're looking for.

"I start with a fresh approach to every design," says Livingston, who has owned and operated her studio on Ark Row since 1986. "Finding out, what is the scope of the project? What are the needs? What's the lifestyle? How is this room used? I very much have a 'form follows function' philosophy."

So when a Tiburon couple enlisted Livingston to redesign their remodeled 4,000-plus-square-foot house, she worked closely with the couple to establish the project's overarching goal: Modernize the dated interior with a mix of the couple's family heirlooms, Livingston's custom designs and unique pieces sourced from artisans in the Bay Area and beyond.

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BEFORE

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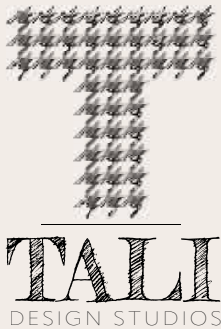
“The idea was to modernize and update, as well as improve the lighting (throughout the home),” Livingston says of the redesign, which included all the home’s major rooms and took more than a year to complete, with Livingston adding the final touches earlier

this month.
Much of the existing furniture in the home had been there since the ’80s, Livingston says, and was Tuscan-style and aesthetically a bit “heavy.”
Part of the challenge was to design the updates around certain pieces of furniture the couple wanted to remain prominent in their home, Livingston says, including a

The fireplace in the bedroom is one of three that were redone as part of the redesign of all the home’s major rooms.
RUTH LIVINGSTON STUDIO

wood chest with drawers in the entryway. She opted for building a more dramatic look around the chest, enlisting an artist to paint the walls with a tan pattern and introducing modern, sculptural lighting that doubles as art on top of the chest.
Throughout much of the home, Livingston

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says, she took her cues from the couple’s “extensive” existing art collection.

“Your art is a reflection of your taste, so that’s helpful for me to know what clients like,” she says.

In the living room, a large piece of art depicting tree branches hangs over the fireplace, which was redone in quartzite. LED lighting was installed on a dimmer behind the stone so the fireplace border can light up at different levels of brightness.

Livingston brought in a wool-and-silk rug, handwoven in Nepal, from her custom-designed Edgewood collection; the design — a leaf pattern incorporating red, teal, mustard and white — draws from the colors in the painting. The rug sits beneath one of Livingston’s custom coffee tables, featuring a large glass top on a twisted vine base, and Livingston also brought one of her custom-designed sofas into the room, in a brick-colored fabric with mahogany arms that can double as end tables.

She found a console table online with a metal base she liked, purchased two and had the glass tops removed and replaced with custom granite to create “something large and very dramatic,” she says.

Livingston has been designing her own collections since the 1990s, after she participated in the San Francisco Decorators Showcase. She works with local artisans to produce case goods, lighting, mirrors, rugs, custom accessories and more. She notes any design she comes up with is driven by



a client wanting something that they just haven’t been able to find elsewhere.

“I don’t basically sit around thinking, ‘I need to design an item,’” Livingston says. “Items get designed for a particular need.”

However, she notes, she frequently also sources things from other designers or finds products already available to best suit her

In the family room, the fireplace was redone in a multitone stone, and cabinets were replaced with mahogany shelves. The coffee table, chair and ottoman are custom Ruth Livingston designs.

RUTH LIVINGSTON STUDIO

clients’ tastes. That includes the teal armchairs that sit across from the sofa in the recently finished Tiburon home, which again pull from the colors in the room’s artwork and complement the rug and sofa.

In the family room, the fireplace was

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Updates to the home's exterior included a redesigned staircase in green slate leading up to the custom teak front door and custom-designed geometric railings coated in a bronze finish.

RUTH LIVINGSTON STUDIO



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redone in a multitone stone, and the existing cabinets on either side were pulled out and replaced with mahogany shelves.

Livingston did away with the somewhat “fussy” window treatments in favor of motorized shades made of a natural-fiber handwoven fabric that make the room optimal for watching TV or movies.

In the family room, the color scheme was derived from a painting over the TV cabinet, which was one of the pieces already owned by the couple, with a focus on bringing a lot of blue tones into the room. The coffee table, chair and ottoman in the room are all custom Livingston designs.

Livingston relocated one of the couple’s paintings, a large-scale depiction of fruit, into the dining room. They wanted to keep their existing dining table, she says, but still wanted to update the room, so she designed custom dining chairs.

The chairs include a mahogany inset along the sides and are covered in a neutral fabric that has a bit of a sheen to it. She brought in another custom rug that drew from the colors of the room’s painting and found a steel light fixture that was hand-forged by an artisan on the East Coast.

Livingston says she wanted the couple’s bedroom to be a calming space for them.

“It’s more monochromatic,” she says. “The artwork is colorful, but the fabrics and materials are more neutral.”

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Custom, *continued from previous page*

The vestibule entrance to the bedroom features a custom-designed mirror, a collaboration between Livingston and Bay Area sculptor Deborah Childress, whose working relationship together dates to the '90s.

The room's bed, chair, dresser and wood-and-marble nightstands are all Livingston's designs. On top of the nightstand sit two tall vases done by a German ceramic designer whom Livingston met when he was showing in the Bay Area many years ago. She invested in his collection, she says, and those vases have been "very popular" over the years.

I don't basically sit around thinking, 'I need to design an item.' Items get designed for a particular need."

— Ruth Livingston

"The client suggested that particular spot," she says. "She loved the pieces."

In addition to revamping the interior of the home, Livingston spearheaded some updates for the home's exterior, including redesigning the staircase leading up to the front door in green slate, a custom teak door and

The living room refresh included redoing the fireplace in quartzite with LED backlighting and custom couch, rug and coffee table designs from Ruth Livingston's collection. The colors used in the room were drawn from the existing artwork over the fireplace.

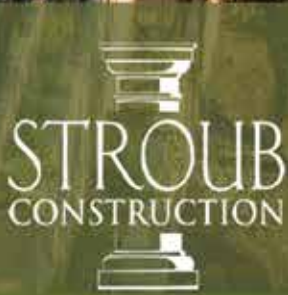
RUTH LIVINGSTON STUDIO

geometric railings coated in a bronze finish that were custom-designed by a local artist. Those railings are complemented by bronze hardware on the front door and bronze exterior light fixtures.

Livingston says she's proud of the project, which she notes turned out "beautifully."

"The photography doesn't really quite capture the feeling you get when you walk into the rooms, with the space, the light (and) the mix of colors and materials," she says. "It's comfortable, it's simple, but it conveys elegance."

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