

Modern *Mediterranean*

*Developer Mark Becker Melds
Classic with Contemporary*

The houses on the uphill side of Elena Silva's street in Upper Rockridge are grand and imposing in a variety of styles, including Mediterranean, contemporary, Tudor and California ranch. On Silva's side of the street, the houses may be equally as eye-popping, but their grandeur is discreet, hidden from view because these structures are carved into the hillside.

As is, people who stroll past Silva's can spy her wall and a set of doors, but passersby can't tell how charming and inviting the living areas and the courtyard behind the gate truly are.

Silva bought the house in 1997 and in 2000 chose to occupy only the top floor, rather than all three stories. A former psychotherapist, Silva likens her current living quarters to a beloved one-bedroom Parisian apartment she once rented. Indeed, her space feels like a very spacious apartment, one that's dominated by a large dining room and glorious views of Oakland, the Bay and San Francisco. The dining room and living room, separated at the back end of the house by a central stairway winding downward, flow into one another. A tidy kitchen and bedroom round out the floor.

Just below, the middle floor contains Silva's former master bedroom and master bath, which are now guest quarters ("I miss the

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Multi-colored wood and cane chairs and an Italian chandelier from her uncle's Montecito house give Silva's dining room a vintage Mediterranean feel.



The master bedroom and bathroom were converted into guest quarters after Silva decided to move up a floor.



Silva considers her house “very feminine—it has lots of curves.”

fireplace and the shower there,” she says with a sigh), and two more bedrooms serve Silva’s two sons when they are in residence. A studio apartment—once inhabited by her daughter and now rented out—occupies the bottom floor.

But to Silva, all the action is on the top floor, her floor, where a onetime guest bedroom has become her bedroom. “Luckily,” she says, “I built a full bath on the main floor.”

The graceful house—a clean, airy, light and bright contemporary take on Mediterranean style—is a collaborative effort between Silva and builder Mark Becker. “This was a fire zone,” Silva says. “All these houses on this street are post-fire construction.” Becker came to Oakland from Southern California after the fire and built some 60 houses on the newly bare lots in the area.

“I’d visited houses he’d designed and built when they were under construction, and they had everything I was looking for: texture and quality of workmanship and design,” says Silva. “Besides, Mark is so creative and enthusiastic. He is inspiring to work with, and he tries to make his clients happy. He seems to be egoless and is open to his clients’ ideas, building a house the way they want him to.” In Silva’s case, he succeeded—she still loves her house.

Silva’s house differs from most Becker homes in that Silva did not paint over the white, unfinished plaster on her

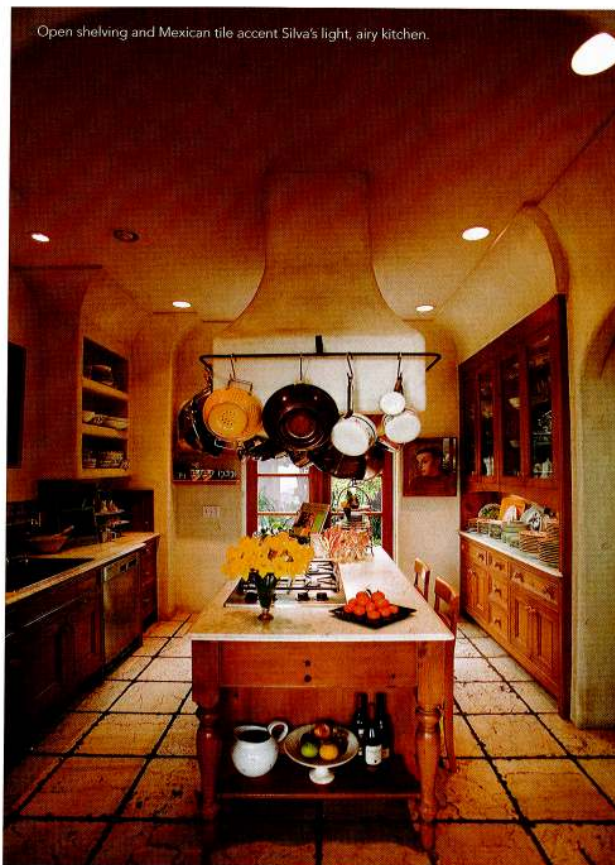
interior walls. The technique mimics the look of an interior more at home in Santa Fe or even Mykonos, Greece. “Elena’s home was the first home where I did not paint the plaster,” Becker says. “We have done that particular method maybe five times since.” Silva considers her house “very feminine—it has lots of curves.”

The plastered arches and rustic sandblasted pine floor add to the appeal of the large, continuous space.

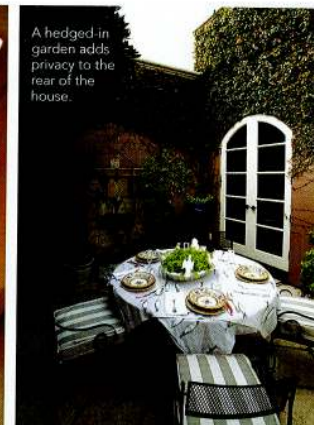
One of Silva’s original ideas was to make the back wall of the house—the wall offering the stunning views—into one big window area. “I wanted [the house] to look old from the front and [to] be very contemporary and all glass in the back,” she says. “I was afraid I’d cut up the view. But these windows, which were designed by Mark and didn’t match my original idea, frame the view, which is more interesting.”

But she did stick to one of her own ideas, a “pivotal” one that called for making the staircase the figurative and literal centerpiece of the house. The curving staircase is adapted from a picture Silva found of one designed by Spanish architect Josep Maria Jujol, Gaudí’s contemporary and occasional collaborator.

Once Silva moved in, she remade an outdoor patio into an indoor drawing studio, which is where she sets up her easel. Her detailed pencil drawings adorn her walls. But Silva still



Open shelving and Mexican tile accent Silva’s light, airy kitchen.



A hedged-in garden adds privacy to the rear of the house.



Silva describes the staircase—which was inspired by Spanish architect Josep Maria Jujol’s work—as the figurative and literal centerpiece of the house.

has plenty of useable outside space: A dining table set for 20 has graced the long, narrow courtyard between the entrance and the house. “It’s walled in, so it’s usually warm,” says Silva.

In the living room, the aesthetic seems to be sheer comfort. A shabby-chic sofa and two easy chairs with ottomans cozy up to the fireplace. Books are everywhere, and a large mirror is propped up against a wall.

Silva’s kitchen is small compared to the sprawling kitchens found in many new houses, but she says it has everything she needs. Mexican tile accents the floors and walls, and the floor comes from the same marble squares of the front courtyard. Seating is at the kitchen island and the steps-away dining room table. Most of the kitchen appliances are tucked away, despite Silva’s affinity for open shelving, enhancing a clean, uncluttered look.

Silva says her collaboration with Becker and subsequent subtle changes have made the house “better than I thought it would be.” Living on the top floor cinched it, although she longs for a fireplace in her bedroom.

Silva is most fond of the light in her home. “It’s everywhere on the top floor,” she says, hinting why she spends all her time there. And who wouldn’t? ■

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