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Rooms With Views

Although a San Francisco apartment is situated high above the city, it feels thoroughly grounded in its Pacific Heights neighborhood



INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Suzanne Tucker*
ARCHITECTURE BY *Andrew Skurman*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Roger Davies*
WRITTEN BY *David Masello*



A photograph of a dining room. In the foreground, a dark wood dining table is set with four chairs. The chairs have dark wood frames with decorative backrests and brown leather seats. A vase with white flowers sits on the table. The room features large windows with patterned curtains that have a floral and leaf design in shades of green, brown, and cream. The floor is made of polished wood. In the background, a balcony with a railing is visible, overlooking a bay with hills in the distance. The lighting is warm and natural, coming from the windows.

Opening pages, left to right: A marble inlaid floor, designed by Suzanne Tucker, in the octagonal entry of a San Francisco apartment replicates patterns found in English manor houses. A 17th-century Italian Baroque desk, above which hangs a work by Lee Ufan, defines a corner of the living room. Opposite: A work by Sean Scully is positioned above a sofa upholstered in velvet by Claremont; the Louis XVI-style armchair is by Dennis & Leen. This page: A game table in the living room is set with 18th-century Piedmontese neoclassical side chairs.





This page: In devising a new floor plan, architect Andrew Skurman relocated the kitchen to the opposite side of the apartment. Decorative painters Elisa Stancil and son James used a denim-blue shade with a striped technique for the cabinetry. Opposite: A bar area in the family room is defined by a blue marble backsplash.



The arched gallery that leads to her bedroom is marked by pendants with amber alabaster bowls. The custom oak-leaf console is from Cox London; the item's faux branches are fashioned of bronze, and the surface is made of Tigrato onyx. The work on paper seen in the background is by Helen Frankenthaler.

THE ELEMENTS THAT LIE just outside this penthouse apartment in San Francisco — the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, distant Napa Valley, whitecaps on the bay waters, the rolling morning fog—are as much a part of the décor as the furnishings and architectural elements within. “This home takes in 360-degree views of the city,” says interior designer Suzanne Tucker, “and there is no aspect of San Francisco that isn’t visible.” As architect Andrew Skurman says of his work on the interiors of this home in a Beaux Arts-style apartment building constructed in 1924, “This is *the* building of the city, and this is *the* apartment of the building. There is no better place.” Both Skurman and Tucker know all about this address, since they have both worked over the years on most of the apartments on its eleven floors.

Tucker and Skurman have worked together on so many projects, in fact, that he likens their collaboration to that of “Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers” in their ability to understand each other. “The sentence I start to say is the one that Andy finishes,” says Tucker, adding, “Andy accommodates me, and he also suffers with me.” As for the client, both of them have worked with her on prior homes.

“This was a completely collaborative project,” says Tucker, “yet having said that and having worked with the client for 25 years, I also already know her style, her taste, her color palette. She’s a beautiful blonde who looks best in certain colors—and that’s the kind of detail a designer needs to take into account for a client. I’m glad as a designer that I didn’t have *carte blanche* with what I was able to do here. It’s not terribly interesting to me when a client gives you total free reign. I love the challenge of creating a very personal space with the person.”

The full-floor residence began with a complete gutting, down to the studs, whereupon Skurman began drawing, by hand, a new layout, one so dramatically altered that most public and private rooms were swapped. “Architecture is a team sport,” Skurman emphasizes, “and a successful project requires working very closely with the clients, with the interior designer, with contractors and landscape architects. If the team is good and friendly and all participants go with the flow, you wind up with a winning project. This was a winning project.”

Given the client’s penchant for the Georgian style, Skurman was intent on imbuing the spaces with coffered ceilings, polished mahogany paneled doors, and, most notably, an

octagonal entry foyer that is, essentially, a structure built within the structure of the apartment, akin to a *duomo*. It was there that Tucker commissioned her design for an inlaid marble floor incorporating a motif harkening to patterns she admires in historic English manor houses. She fashioned a design whose shapes appear to radiate and swirl in place. “The pattern creates a psychological movement, directing you to where to walk in the apartment,” says Tucker.

Tucker has a special talent for reading the architecture of a building and of a room. (Examples abound in her new book, *Extraordinary Interiors*, published in 2022 by The Monacelli Press.) Although the ceilings here are 12 feet high, the French doors that lead to the wraparound terrace rise only part of the way up the walls. Tucker’s solution for emphasizing the height of the living room while maintaining a visual harmony was to create faux transoms above each French door. She designed mirrored panes that replicate the door’s glass ones, but she concealed the reflecting surfaces with matchstick blinds. “This effect gives that illusion that there is light streaming in from outside, while emphasizing the height and scale of the room,” she says. As Skurman adds, “In our work together over the years on so many projects, Suzanne and I always use sheer curtains to cover the wall over short windows. In this case, she actually used mirrored windows.”

Such a clever technique is in keeping, too, with Skurman’s loyalty to the tenets of Georgian architecture. “Those of us who like classical architecture and build in that fashion never make anything up. We might combine styles, but we always go back to historical references.” In pointing to the paneled doors and the carved wainscoting throughout the apartment, Skurman says, “We used moldings appropriate in scale. We have ways of calibrating, based on the Greek orders, the size and shape of all such details.”

Fortunately, all of Tucker’s and Skurman’s design work was completed just prior to the pandemic. While the client was intimately involved in the process from the start, Tucker did insist that she “stay away at the end. I always tell clients that I want them to have the experience of walking into your dream. It’s much better when they’re not seeing everything taking shape every step of the way.” Indeed, upon seeing the completed home, the client reconfirmed Tucker’s favorite wish. “The most rewarding aspect of my life as a designer is to make an individual happy. I want them to step into the finished project and start living happily ever after. After all, don’t we all want to live a fairytale-like life?” ■

This page: The bed in the client's master suite uses linens from the Suzanne Tucker Home collection, for Julia B. The linen and silk bed hangings are from Claremont. Opposite: A George II mirror, whose mottled glass reflects its age, is set above an 18th-century Danish Rococo console. The Lotus Leaf lamp is from Soane.



