

SAN FRANCISCO | PENINSULA | SILICON VALLEY

# H GENTRY ME

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2014







A Napoleon III *jardinere* rests atop an elaborate marble coffee table in Athena and Timothy Blackburn's living room (preceding overleaf). A spectacular chandelier lowers for lighting and cleaning at the touch of a button in this marvelous circular dining room (above) with lacquered walls. The Blackburns love to entertain and set their exquisite table with beautiful pieces, including a set of Hermès china featuring a different orchid on each piece. A grand piano is set before a massive Coromandel screen in the living room. A cozy sitting room off the guest bedroom (right) features a 19th-century Chinese elmwood coffee table and a pair of hand-tooled leather saddles embellished with gilt on the walls.



**A**s a Valentine's Day gift in 2012, Timothy Blackburn commissioned a ballet, *The Adagio of Spartacus*, choreographed by Yuri Possokhov in his wife Athena's honor. As a surprise this summer for her birthday, he arranged for the dancers to return to Napa Valley's Festival del Sole (of which the Blackburns were founding supporters) to perform under the stars. "I couldn't believe it," smiles Athena. "It was absolutely magical." Theirs is a wonderful love story—kindred spirits with a palpable zest for life.

When they became engaged in 2002, a good friend who lived across Huntington Park offered to host an engagement party for them. Recalls Athena, "I knew she had been remodeling her apartment for quite a while. When I finally saw it, I felt like I had come home." Timothy was equally enthusiastic. The engagement soiree was elegant and that was that.

Nearly a decade later, the Blackburns were enjoying dinner with famed architect Andrew Skurman. "He insisted we buy our friend's apartment," recalls Athena. "Andrew knew we were Francophiles, adore Paris, and appreciate art and architecture. He knew we were a good match for the apartment." The Blackburns already had their pied-à-terre in San Francisco and a sprawling country place in St. Helena. They weren't in the market for any more real estate. But fate had other plans. "It was meant to be," smiles Athena.

Award-winning interior designer Suzanne Tucker had worked on the apartment's exquisite transformation with Skurman and had already selected a number of antique pieces that fit the space to perfection. She had also commissioned custom pieces that could be at home nowhere else. When Athena and Timothy decided to make an offer, they made sure to include the furnishings as well. And over the past three years, they have added a few key pieces, making the home truly theirs.

When Skurman recalls the project, he notes of the construction, "It looked like Dresden after World War II. We removed every-









*“Andrew insisted we buy our friend’s apartment,” recalls Athena. “He knew we were Francophiles, adore Paris, and appreciate art and architecture. He knew we were a good match for the apartment.”*

thing that had been on this floor of the building and started from scratch.” The Beaux Arts building had originally been a Hearst compound, complete with a swimming pool on the roof. “We took our cues from the building,” says Skurman, “the curved windows, the wonderful undulating wrought-iron work.” Skurman, a true disciple of classical architecture, simply beams as he walks through the Blackburns’ apartment, carefully pointing out detail after detail, from the circular dining room to the tonneau barrel-shaped master bath, to the parquet de Versailles floor. This is clearly one of his favorite projects and it’s easy to understand why. Every inch of the

home has been carefully thought out and executed with a precision of craftsmanship that is staggering.

The Blackburns commissioned Skurman to update the curved foyer. “I wanted it to be a true French Cerulean blue,” says Athena. The painstaking process required alternating coats of paint brushed with gold foil. The result is soothing and rich—its depth coming alive as the light changes. A marble floor is inlaid with cabochon-cut limestone pieces reinforcing the circular motif echoed throughout the home. In the living room, an antique 15th-century Coromandel screen dominates one wall, while another is covered in a

Athena’s collection of blue Baccarat and silver pieces (opposite, top left) rests atop a table in the living room. A game table inlaid with mother-of-pearl (opposite, top right) is a family heirloom. Architect Andrew Skurman’s attention to detail can be seen in the library’s (opposite bottom right) stunning cabinetry and paneling. A Louis XV giltwood console with marble top and a Louis XV mirror (opposite, bottom left) make a dramatic statement in the foyer. An antique Oushak rug (below) sets the color scheme in the guest bedroom.



Belgian tapestry that Athena and Timothy picked up on their travels through Europe. Adjacent to a sofa covered in a silk linen is a grouping of rare pieces of Louis XVI silver and crystal that Athena has collected over the years.

The apartment's hand-scraped white oak floors gleam in the library that boasts a massive Louis XV black lacquered bureau plat with bronze doré mounts. Beyond the library is the spectacular dining room with brown lacquered walls, so rich in color as to appear black. Athena and Timothy love to entertain and use the wonderful space often, setting the table with Hermes china, antique Tiffany silver, and Baccarat crystal. In a nod to dear friend Chef Thomas Keller (the Blackburns are regulars at The French Laundry), they also have a complete set of Keller's eponymous china made by Bernardaud.

The master suite is a soothing space wrought in buttery tones.

A black and white portrait of Coco Chanel hangs on one wall. An enfilade of spaces can be viewed from the bedroom, dressing room, and the bath beyond. In the dressing room resides one of Athena's favorite pieces—a game table from Damascus inlaid with mother of pearl and topped with an Egyptian silver tray and objets d'art.

On the opposite side of the apartment is a guest suite with a gracious sitting room that the Blackburns use constantly. "Here, we read the paper, have coffee, and watch a little bit of news," says Athena, who always watches the news in French first. "It's good to get another perspective."

In the spacious kitchen, Timothy had cabinetry adjusted to incorporate a wine cellar. "It was just about the only thing the apartment lacked," sighs Athena. "If you think about it—it was truly the ultimate turn-key property." ♦

The master bedroom includes a dramatic black four poster bed (opposite) gilded with ivy leaves. The guest powder room (below left) is a jewel box of a space hand-painted by San Francisco artist Willem Racke to resemble precious tortoise shell. The master bath (below right) earned both interior designer Suzanne Tucker and architect Andrew Skurman awards for its elegant design.





