

CRAFT ELEVATED TO ART THE BOHLEN COLLECTION

Family Artists | Sculptor David Hayes | Carmel Art Scene | Amazing Drawings

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

An eclectic, passionate collector
creates a home fit for her art.

BY DANA MICUCCI PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN





FOR LAURIE MCFARLIN, a jewelry maker, stunt pilot and antiques lover, collecting is, above all, an affair of the heart. Her exotic 1920s Italianate house in Marin County, California, is more than just a showcase for the one-of-a-kind objects that she has acquired over the years. It is the heart of her existence, a container for the memories and stories that these objects evoke, reflecting back to her the consciously woven fabric of her passionate, adventurous life.

Whether it's a fancy 18th-century Italian rosewood cabinet, a 16th-century French stone mantel or an antique Chinese lacquered screen that has caught her eye, McFarlin's eclectic taste is informed by a ravenous curiosity and a penchant for mystery. "I'm not the kind of collector who needs to fill certain quotas or gaps," she says. "And I don't say this area in my home needs a particular antique or artwork. I allow for a lot of serendipity. I am most drawn to out-of-the-ordinary pieces with an element of whimsy."

McFarlin, a native Texan whose travels have taken her from the hidden corners of Europe to safaris in Africa and backpacking through Bali and Thailand, is far from ordinary herself. When she's not exploring the world, she can be found in her own stunt plane performing aeronautic acrobatics over Namibia. She has also flown vintage Russian MiG jet fighters, sailed the Caribbean, produced a documentary about whales and taught wilderness survival courses. McFarlin, who trained as a sculptor, is currently teaching tribal peoples in Zimbabwe and Botswana how to craft and market jewelry made of local materials. She traces her passion for collecting to her childhood, when her parents would bring her beautiful objects from their overseas journeys, which she describes as "flights of fancy" that fired her imagination.



Previous pages: The living room is defined by its eclectic treasures. Detail (right) of an Italian rosewood cabinet, inlaid with etched ivory depicting mythological scenes, 18th century with 19th-century base.

But it wasn't until eight years ago, when she fell in love with a majestic terracotta stucco and red tile-roofed house overlooking Mount Tamalpais in northern California, that she found an appropriate outlet for her own creative vision. Wishing to establish a "firm foundation" for herself and her daughter, Hayden, 23, McFarlin instantly set out to renovate the house with the help of San Francisco architect Andrew Skurman and interior designer Suzanne Tucker of Tucker & Marks, also in San Francisco.

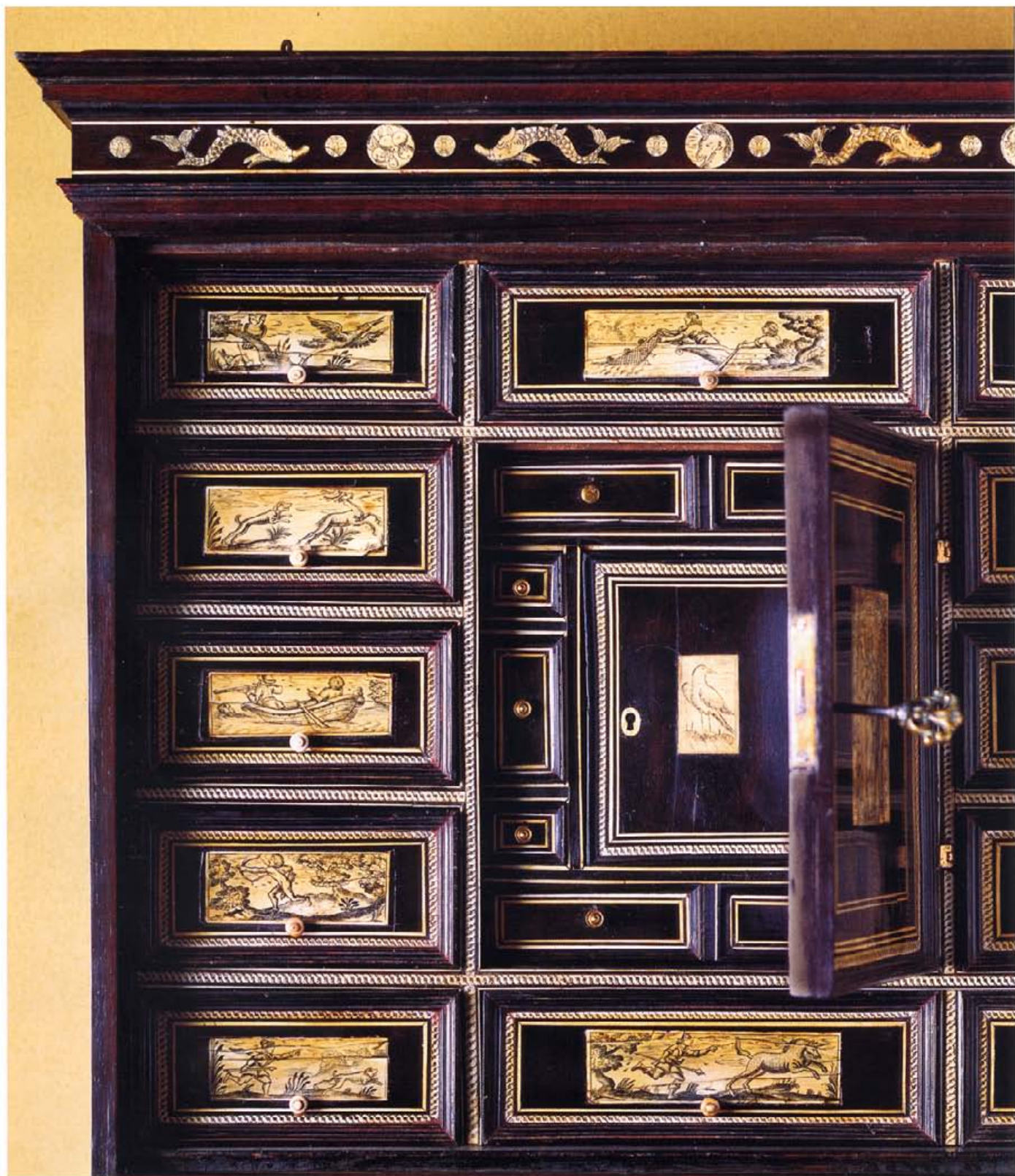
For two years, Tucker shopped galleries, shows and auctions in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, France and Italy, sometimes with McFarlin, discovering many treasures close to home at the annual San Francisco Fall Antiques Show, one of Tucker's favorite sources. "The process was very enjoyable and spontaneous; we had no set design scheme in mind for the house," Tucker says. "It was all about finding the unusual piece."

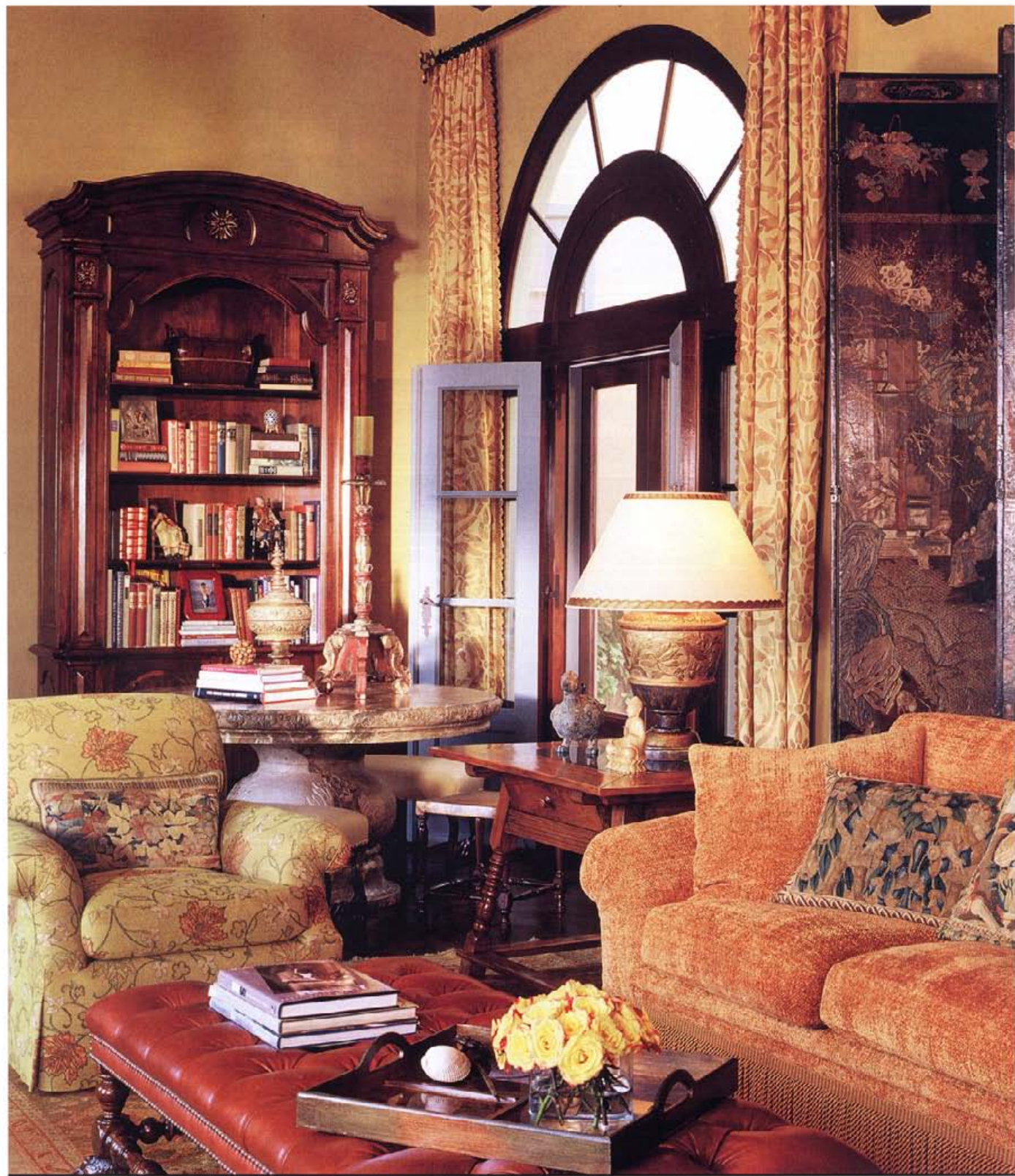
McFarlin particularly admires antiques with intricate artisan work such as inlays, stenciling and carving, because they have a handcrafted look that shows the maker's unique fingerprint and interpretation. "All the antiques we found are so finely crafted and magnificent in their own right, but they also work together in a very warm way," she says. "We sometimes designed a whole room around one or a few pieces that held special meaning for me."

In the cavernous great room, furnishings custom-designed by Tucker & Marks, European and Asian antiques, European textiles and Oushak carpets combine to reflect an exotic amalgam of cultures. One such anchor is a 12-panel Chinese coromandel lacquered screen, circa 1714. Originally owned by a member of San Francisco's de Young family, the screen depicts scenes from women's lives in the Chinese court, which McFarlin says resonates with her experience as a mother creating a life with her daughter, enjoying the same close bond she shared with her own mother.

Also commanding attention in the great room is an 18th-century Italian rosewood cabinet, inlaid with etched ivory depicting mythological scenes and allegories. "I love all the hidden drawers and secret compartments, which offer the promise of yet-to-be-discovered treasures both past and future," McFarlin says of the piece. She also fell for an Italian Baroque ivory-inlaid and ebonized wood center table, because, she says, "The inlay was so exquisite that it made me gasp." Other favorite finds include a stunning 18th-century Italian chandelier, made of gilded wood, glass beads, tole, blown glass and cut crystal, which adds a touch of fantasy to the master bedroom, whose vaulted beamed ceiling Tucker modeled after a ceiling in designer Hubert de Givenchy's house in the south of France. Expanding upon the fantasy theme is a circa-1950 seashell-encrusted bust by Jeanine Janet, one of just four made for the noted Parisian couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga, that presides over a custom-built, colonnaded outdoor dining pavilion.

There is a transporting, romantic quality to McFarlin's home, which evokes a stately Italian villa or manor house in the south of France with its walnut and limestone floors, and French doors and arched windows offering sweeping views of the lush countryside. Architectural fragments, such as antique French limestone mantels and a pair of 18th-century Italian gesso columns that flank the doorway to the





"I am most drawn to 'out-of-the-ordinary pieces with an element of whimsy.'" —Laurie McFarlin

great room, reveal McFarlin's proclivity for sensual, curved surfaces. Sequestered outdoor courtyards feature the lulling sound of gurgling water from antique fountains.

Intricate openwork screen panels in the master bedroom and bath, designed by Tucker and hand-carved in Nepal, reflect McFarlin's passion for Moorish influences on Mediterranean design, while recalling memories of her visits to the Alhambra palace in Spain. Such artisanal details also extend to the old ceiling beams in the great room, which were hand-stenciled with intricate floral and geometric patterns by California artist Elisa Stancil, creating the illusion of a coffered Italianate ceiling. The greatest design challenge, says Tucker, was opening up, enlarging and modernizing existing rooms to produce a natural flow in which the antiques could serve as centerpieces.

McFarlin's longtime personal collections include elegant silver crowns made by Spanish colonial artists to adorn wood sculptures of saints called *santos*, displayed on the 17th-century Spanish Baroque walnut console table in the entryway. When McFarlin discovered the crowns in a New Mexico antiques shop while living in Santa Fe, she "fell in love with their intricate silverwork." That same delicate, handcrafted quality is evident in the miniature Venetian glassware that she collects on her many trips to Venice.

Small objects hold a special appeal for the 5-foot, 10-inch McFarlin, who jokingly says they may symbolize "a subconscious quest for balance." She is especially passionate about the hundreds of miniature books and manuscripts she has acquired over the past 15 years, some of which are displayed in bookcases in the hallway outside her bedroom. At one-eighth of an inch to three inches tall, these treasures range from Babylonian clay tablets from 2000 B.C. to 15th-century Italian illuminated manuscripts, a girl's diary from the Civil War era, the first book to travel into space with the Russian cosmonauts and a bejeweled book created by Salvador Dalí. "Many antique miniature books were made for easy transport while traveling, and they're still being made today," says McFarlin. "When I was 10, my mother gave me a leather-bound miniature book that fascinated me. It was about a quarter of the size of my fingernail and had the words "I love you" written in 25 different languages. Many years later, I discovered three miniature books by Shakespeare in an antiques shop, and the collecting monster was born. Each book reminds me of that first very special gift from my mother; they add a lot of heart to the house."

As a keeper of her life's stories, McFarlin's home itself, in all its varied aesthetic expressions, is perhaps the ultimate collection, grounding her dazzling flights of fancy in a single harmonious whole. "Above all," says McFarlin, "I want to collect and live with things that bring me great joy." ■

Illuminated manuscripts, antique miniature books and diaries. Facing: Part of a 12-panel Chinese coromandel screen (far right), c. 1714.



DESIGNER SUZANNE TUCKER'S SOURCEBOOK

ANDRÉE MACÉ, Paris
011.33.1.42.27.43.03

BERNARD STEINITZ, Paris
011.33.1.42.89.20.20 cmo-antiques.com/steinitz.htm

DANIEL STEIN ANTIQUES, San Francisco
415.956.5620 danielsteinantiques.com

EUROPA ANTIQUES & FINE ART, Summerland, CA
805.969.4989 antiqueseuropa.com

FREDERICK P. VICTORIA & SON, New York
212.813.9651 fpvictoria.com

L'ANTIQUAIRE & THE CONNOISSEUR INC., New York
212.517.9176 antique@webspan.net

QUATRRAIN INC., Los Angeles
310.652.0243 quatrtrain.net

R.M. BAROKH ANTIQUES, Los Angeles
310.652.2771 rmbarokhantiques.com

ROBERT DOMERGUE & COMPANY, San Francisco
415.781.4034 rdomerguecompany@earthlink.net

THERIEN & CO., Los Angeles
310.657.4615 therien.com

TONY KITZ ORIENTAL CARPETS, San Francisco
415.346.2100 tonykitzrugs.com