





# ROOM WITH A VIEW

A remodel turns into a complete reconfiguration with stunning results.

**BY LAURA HILGERS • PHOTOS BY MARK SCHWARTZ**

**S**HORTLY AFTER STEVE Goldman, a retired computer entrepreneur, and his wife, Melanie Love, moved into their home in the hills of Mill Valley, they realized something was wrong. Their lower-level master bedroom was oriented in a strange direction and its window, which looked out on Mount Tamalpais, was too small. “Those first few weeks we lived here,” says Goldman, “I kept saying, ‘Man, I wish that window was a little taller because you can’t see enough of the sky and I wish it was a little lower because you can’t see enough of the redwoods.’”

Because the couple bought the house for its proximity to the mountain, the limited view from the bedroom was an unexpected disappointment. Their other home is in Winter Park, Florida — where Goldman’s computer hardware company was located and where they still have family — and Goldman had wanted to move near Marin’s highest peak for some time. “I lived in San Francisco in the ’70s, and I went to the top of Mount Tam once and sat by the ranger station, and I’m a physicist, so I don’t use the term ‘energy field’ often, but there was just something there,” says Goldman. “I felt like it was my place. Every time I came to San Francisco for business trips, I’d go up there.”

When they bought the house in 2010 and started living a bicoastal life, it was the culmination of a long-held dream — of which they wanted more. “After a few weeks, I finally said, ‘You know, we’ve got to talk to somebody about this,’” says Goldman. “I was just thinking about a window. I wasn’t thinking about the entire downstairs.” »

An entire downstairs, however, is exactly what they got. After hiring Ron Sutton of Sutton Suzuki Architects, Goldman and Love realized that the lower level had been poorly laid out. “My first reaction,” says Sutton, “was to try to organize the space better in relation to the grid of the house. It needed to be more straightforward.” To that end, he — and the construction firm of Ireland-Robinson and Hadley, Inc. — gutted the lower level, reconfiguring the walls and rooms completely.

But Sutton also had another design challenge. Goldman is a fan of modern homes (their house in Florida is a minimalist showcase) but this home, at least from the outside, is a shingled Craftsman. Love, who prefers a more traditional house, was happy with the home’s upstairs, with its Mediterranean-style stucco walls and wood-beamed ceilings. “My challenge was to create something that felt contemporary in design yet felt like it fit in with the rest of the house,” says Sutton, “so there wasn’t a stark difference between the two floors when you walked down.”

He solved this problem by using natural materials, such as rough stone, limestone and mahogany, which echoed the warmth of the upstairs. He also created a neutral beige paint color scheme to tie the two levels together. You don’t get the feeling, as you descend the steps, that these are two different homes.

What you feel, instead, is a showstopping awe as you enter the master bedroom, which is dominated by a nearly seamless window 11 feet high and 32 feet long. It’s a nonstop reel of nature, reminiscent of the David Hockney “nature” movies that were on view at the 2013 de Young exhibit. Goldman and Love intended it that way, and they’ve chosen not to include any two-dimensional art in the home. “Mount Tam and the redwoods are more spectacular than anything we could ever hang on the walls,” Goldman says.

In order to achieve this stunning effect, Sutton had to lower the floor of the bedroom by 18 inches and design a window with the smallest mullions (a vertical or horizontal element that forms a division between units of a window) possible. “We probably had a dozen meetings where I’d say, ‘can’t you make those mullions any smaller?’” says Goldman. “And Ron would go back and find a way to get another quarter inch out.”

Because Goldman spent 25 years of his career getting engineers to do things that seemed impossible, he doesn’t take no for an answer. In the end, he got a bedroom punctuated by a seamlessness between the indoors and out. “I basically wanted an infinity bedroom,” says Goldman.

Nature’s beauty is echoed in the room itself. One side is consumed by a dramatic stone wall that stops, in one section,



a foot shy of the ceiling. It's constructed of oblong pieces of Texas limestone stacked one on top of the other, like a piece of abstract art. It's also lit from above, like art.

"I wanted to create a visual separation between the master bath and the master bedroom that was not just drywall," says Sutton. "We wanted something artistic as well as structural, and we applied the stone to give texture and interest to it." As for the gap between the wall and the ceiling? "We created that so the curtains could run behind it," says Sutton, "and again, it was a play of the soft texture of the curtains against the hard rugged rock."

The room is anchored by warm mahogany built-ins: a bed frame, bedside tables, dressers and a mini-kitchen. And it's softened by the green curtains that pick up the color of the redwood grove just outside the window.

The emphasis on natural materials segues into the master bathroom, with a limestone soaking tub so deep and voluminous that it literally took a feat of engineering to figure out how to fill and drain it quickly. It's outfitted with the largest possible regulation faucet and an electric solenoid valve, which Goldman determined could drain it four times more quickly than an ordinary drain. Above the bathtub, there's an elegant Ron Sutton touch, a mahogany soffit shelf with embedded LED lights that shine upward.

Goldman had originally wanted the ceilings higher in the lower level, which would have been impossible without raising the whole house, so Sutton accentuated verticality whenever possible. This can be seen in the eight-foot doorways and in the powder room, where a 63-inch-long silver faucet drops from the ceiling, flanked by equally vertical teardrop lighting.

The powder room also points to one of the design challenges of the home: the differences of aesthetic preference between Goldman and Love. "The house in Florida is a museum; it's all black granite and glass and white," says Love. "But I like lots of color, like crazy color, and everything Steve was picking out for this house was beige." The powder room, however, is anchored by a beautiful piece of green marble, on top of which sits a green glass wok-shaped sink. The nearby laundry room also has a dash of color, with eggplant countertops and a backsplash of tiny tiles in eggplant, white and brown.

Love may not have gotten her crazy color, but the house works, both in the continuity between the two levels and in the full advantage taken of Mother Nature's endless "film" loop. Mount Tam looks like it's right there, even though it's over a mile away. Deer saunter by. A coyote howls on a rock outcropping a few feet from Love and Goldman's bed. "It's hard to describe what it's like waking up to this every morning," Goldman says. "We've been here a couple of years now, and we see all of this every evening and every morning, and we just never get tired of it." M

