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Walk around in designers' dreams Showcase home open to visitors to explore

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You could stroll down the Champs-Elysees to pick up decorating ideas this spring. Or you could stay right here and visit the grand chateau in Presidio Heights that houses this year's San Francisco Decorator Showcase.

Open to the public through May 29, this 8,700-square-foot home features rooms designed by some of the Bay Area's best designers and filled with furniture and art to enhance its French Renaissance Revival style.

The front entrance hall designed by Chris Reed glitters with 32 mirrored panels, a shimmering silk-upholstered banquet, and a delicate mica and garnet chandelier. A small end table topped with light-reflective crystals by San Francisco designer Gary Hutton punctuates the opulent room. Across from the grand staircase carpeted in a sleek leopard print sits a phone booth alcove cleverly designed by William Wick.

A drawing room as elegant as a midnight blue velvet smoking jacket opens up to the right of the entrance. Designer Steven Volpe mixed modern sculpture, art and light fixtures with beautiful antiques, such as the tall 1950s French bookcases that anchor one end of the room. A deep gold Robert Motherwell painting glows against the dusky blue-gray wall color, while a motion-sensitive bird chips in the branches of a bronze tree sculpture.

"I designed the room to be forward-thinking and unexpected, but still paid attention to the traditional architecture," says Volpe.

The dining room/library on the opposite side of the entrance is more library than dining room, though the handsome 18th century walnut table can seat six comfortably in front of the original marble fireplace. Designers Douglas Durkin and Greg Elich sandblasted the original mahogany paneling to dispel the gloomy interior. Soft blue and taupe striped French silk curtains contrast nicely.

Architect Dan Phipps opened up the kitchen to the adjacent dining-turned-family room to let in more light and connect the former cook's quarters to the rest of the house. Designer David Kensington used a wonderfully subtle palette of mushroom, smoke, ash and white on the walls, molding and cabinetry to serve as a backdrop for the art -- some old (a first century Roman bust) and some new (Ellsworth Kelly paintings).

"I'd just returned from Brussels when I started designing the space," says Kensington. "And I loved the way the quiet color palettes I saw there allowed the art -- and the people -- in the space to stand out."

An oversized banquette, an enormous walnut island topped with Calcutta Oro marble -- "warmer than Carrera," Kensington says -- and two prominent light fixtures that combine old and new elements gracefully fill the expansive space.

The rest of the house includes a number of smallish bedrooms and one large master suite. The master bedroom and sitting room, designed by Tish Key, reintroduce a color palette not seen for some years -- dark navy, crisp white and sunny yellow. The cheery but sophisticated mix of cream carpets, white Parsons-style

bed, and ivory silk drapes accented with blue pillows and framed collections of blue-winged butterflies can't help but lift one's spirits. Particularly appealing is the "Lapis Wave" wallpaper by Maya Romanoff on the sitting room walls and the pale gray silk velvet chairs adorned with blue Fortuny fabric pillows.

"Throw in some silk velvet and Fortuny and you really can't go wrong," says Key with a smile.

Three other bedrooms to note include a charming nursery, a sophisticated teenage girl's room and a swank guest bedroom. The elaborate garden-themed murals in the nursery were inspired by '20s nursery scenes and painted by decorative painter William Racke. Seamstress Susan Lind Chastain used a number of interesting fabrics, including an innovative metal and silk fabric for the crib canopy and a fuzzy slipcover fabric that recalls a large stuffed animal for a slipper chair.

"Using multiple fabrics in a room -- even a baby's room -- makes it much more interesting," says Chastain. "This is a fantasy space so the fabrics aren't particularly washable, but you could find counterparts that are."

The teenage retreat designed by Caitlin Stewart-Jones is heavy on sophisticated glitter and luminosity, much like a young girl's makeup kit. Quartz granules cover the floor (glitzy but comfortable once the flip-flops are kicked off?), abalone buttons shimmer on the curtains, and a lavender resin desk top glows in front of the stunning view outside the oval windows. Sensual velvets and chenilles in shades of purple and silver cover the bed and ottomans, while the floral fabric motifs are duplicated in a series of etched glass mirrors hung on the painted lilac striped walls.

Down the hall, Steven Miller created a peaceful guest bedroom in shades of blue and white. The elegant curves of the wrought-iron bed are duplicated in the blue painted details on the walls and the blue satin curtains with a white cotton "coin" overlay. Strong geometric elements in the bed cover, accent pillows, Chanel suit-inspired carpet and a hip wallpaper and Lucite screen balance the curves. A custom-made Lucite desk topped with cream leather and antique nail heads illustrates how, in the right hands, an unexpected combination of materials can make for the perfect mix.

Unusual bathroom treatments include an emerald green powder room painted with a chinoiserie-style mural by Katherine Jacobus, and the grand master bath designed by Grant Gibson that features a warm onyx countertop and tub surround. Particularly lovely is the third-floor powder room, where Christel Heinelt and Thad Warren took inspiration from the honey-onyx mosaic floor and the cocoonlike intimacy of the room. The artistic duo painted lush floral motifs on the Venetian plaster walls in honey-colored hues, then stamped them with floral designs and honeycomb patterns using real honeycombs.

Along with the romantic powder room, the third floor is filled with "themed" rooms -- the two most successful being the eclectic artist's retreat by Orinda designer Catherine Macfee, and the groovy rec room by Kevin Hackett of Johnny Grey Inc. Macfee's room is lined with tortoiseshell-painted bamboo and filled with exotic collectibles and art, including a rare Chagall. Hackett's family room features a deluxe bar, a media center, and a SensiTile light wall on which to project images and color. Environmentally-friendly furniture by el and reclaimed chestnut plank flooring and window louvers speak to a welcome cutting-edge trend toward green design.

From top to toe, clever ideas abound in this showcase house. Note the high-energy craft/laundry room in the basement. Designed by interior design students at the Academy of Art University, the room features a wrapping paper station, origami-inspired furnishings, and a wall of clever cabinets that conceal a sewing area, pull-out ironing board and massage oils -- all in oh-so-chic shades of Kabuki red, black and white.