

VALLEY STYLE

A New York City couple buys a midcentury home and transforms it into a comfortable, modern gem in Portola Valley.

BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BESS FRIDAY
STYLED BY BETH PROTASS

THE PROJECT

Two New York City transplants with two large rescue dogs found the perfect midcentury, 3,345-square-foot home to transform. They wanted to create a warm, open gathering place for their families and for entertaining colleagues. The home, which is nestled on a gentle hillside, offers lush green views of Windy Hill. Soon after buying the property in 2020, the couple also learned they were expecting—so they were thrilled to add a nursery to the scope of work.

THE TEAM

The 1954 home, which features post-and-beam construction, would need a complete overhaul, with updated finishes and fixtures, plus new furnishings and art. The couple selected Portola Valley-based designer Melinda Mandell, principal at Melinda Mandell Interior Design (melindamandell.com), for the project.

“From handcrafted finishes, curated vintage finds and quality fixtures, every space we do radiates craftsmanship and warmth,” says Mandell. “Personally, I’m drawn to both edgy, unusual elements as well as pieces that feel comfortably familiar, almost like a dream or a warm memory.”

Mandell says she and her team have a refined process for working with clients, “from research and goal-setting to design concept, design development, documentation and then execution through construction-project management, procurement and installation. We partner with those who have a passion for art, craftsmanship, color, beauty and excellence.”

The living room was transformed into a lighter, more open and spacious sanctuary.



The dining room's angular table offers plenty of versatility for the family.



From top: Built-in shelving adds a decorative element to the living room and lots of functionality; various shades of blue, a homeowner favorite, were incorporated in rooms.

THE GOALS

Despite the home's age, Mandell says it was in decent shape; it simply needed exciting elements to complete the transformation. "We have in our notes from early meetings with the clients, 'elegant and cool, but not unfriendly.' As far as colors, the homeowners love cool tones, especially blues. And we were asked not to use red or orange. So, the color scheme we developed carries sophisticated blues and neutrals throughout,

only deviating from this in the guest suite."

Another design request from the client: Don't go overboard on furniture crafted from wood.

"This was an easy request to accommodate, as there are so many creative makers and designs out there," says Mandell. "The spaces all have a balance of beautiful materials and finishes—we used tables in marble, concrete and brass. And when we did use wood, we varied the finishes

significantly, ranging from a dark blue-stained oak to natural walnut to bleached maple."

Before adding the furnishings, the design team, led by Taylor Elgabalawy, dispensed with carpet and installed oak hardwood flooring throughout the home; they also wired the home with new light fixtures to better define each space and to emphasize beloved artwork in key areas throughout the home.

"Adding lighting to a post-and-beam home with a flat roof was challenging," says Mandell. "It meant we had to penetrate the ceiling and roof simultaneously, and then patch and reseal the roof from above. We had a great contractor who has a lot of experience with Eichler homes—which are built in the same manner as this one—so he wasn't fazed."

LIVING ROOM

Mandell says the goal was to make the space feel lighter, more open and spacious. "We accomplished this by first tackling the fireplace and the adjoining



bench that was blocking the window,” she says. “We tore out the bench, which created symmetry and opened up the room. One of my proudest accomplishments with this project is a small thing that goes unnoticed. We were able to match the original 1954 green slate floor, and patch the area where the bench had been. I couldn’t believe that we found the same material, and that it had the same tones coming from the quarry more than half a century ago.”

White oak built-in shelves were added to hold art, giving purpose to an otherwise awkward wall. The genius move also takes advantage of the high ceilings. For furnishing, Mandell chose a pair of barrel-back chairs and, for drama, wingback chairs—plus, a marble side table from Seer Studio ([seer-studio.com](#)). “Central in our bookcase is a spectacular sublimation on aluminum by Linda Connor via Haines Gallery ([hainesgallery.com](#)),” says Mandell. “Surrounding it are ceramic art pieces by Paul Briggs ([briggspictures.com](#)), Paige Stewart ([paige-stewart.com](#)) and BZippy ([bzippyandcompany.com](#)).

DINING ROOM AND KITCHEN

For this important space, Mandell changed the room’s orientation, enabling the family to have a longer table and more versatility. “For holidays and larger gatherings, the stunning angular table is equipped with leaves to expand to seat even more,” says Mandell. “The table was custom made by Keith Fritz via HEWN ([hewnsf.com](#)); he has made dining tables for a number of past presidents.”

Another lure of the room: a stunning lighting installation by Apparatus

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—DESIGNER MELINDA MANDELL

Studio ([apparatusstudio.com](#)).

“Apparatus was great to collaborate with, revising the drop heights and mesh rope lengths and working with the angled ceiling—all to help accomplish my specific vision of balance and interest from each vantage point,” says Mandell, who also added an oak buffet piece to serve as a strong focal point at the convergence of the

dining and living area.

With a kitchen refresh, including new Sub-Zero ([subzero-wolf.com](#)) appliances, fixtures and mosaic backsplash tile from Vintage Bath ([vintagebath.com](#)) in Los Altos, the family suddenly had a highly functional space. New cabinet hardware is from Manzoni ([manzoni.us](#)), and Mandell softened the kitchen’s overall



The owner’s suite boast blackout window treatments that, when pulled up, offer stunning views of the oak-filled yard. Opposite page: A cozy reading nook graces the bedroom.

One of the home's vibrant bathrooms is a testament to the use of color and exceptional materials.

look with naturally woven shades that filter harsh light.

OWNER'S SUITE

“For the owner’s suite, our goal was both to give the space an insulated, quiet feel while keeping the colors and tones light and cool,” says Mandell. “The client requested blackout window treatments, so the cocoon effect is accomplished when the wall-to-wall drapery is drawn. When the window treatments are open, the room still has a private feeling, with views of oak trees outside.”

Tones of light blue characterize the room, with blue-gray-washed oak nightstands by Lawson Fenning ([lawsonfenning.com](#)) and bedding by Coyuchi ([coyuchi.com](#)). “Custom pillows complete the scheme, along with window-pane plaid euros and a watercolor-blue bolster,” says Mandell.

HOW THE HOME IS LIVING

Mandell shares a quote from a recent email from the happy couple—now parents of a 1-year-old. “They said they loved working with us and are so proud of their home, especially the details and quality.” It’s proof that, with abundant design savvy, a midcentury classic can feel as refined and welcoming as ever. ◉



HOME DETAILS

Home Type
Single-family

Location
Portola Valley

Designer
Melinda Mandell Design
[melindamandell.com](#)

RESOURCES

1st Dibs
Rosewood dresser, guest suite
[1stdibs.com](#)

Apparatus Studio
Lighting, kitchen
[apparatusstudio.com](#)

BZippy
Art, living room
[bzippyandcompany.com](#)

Coyuchi
Bedding, owner’s suite
[coyuchi.coim](#)

Dolby Chadwick Gallery
Tom Lieber art, dining room
[dolbychadwickgallery.com](#)

HEWN
Table, dining room
[hewnsf.com](#)

Lawson Fenning
Nightstands, owner’s suite
[lawsonfenning.com](#)

Manzoni
Hardware, kitchen
[manzoni.com](#)

Paige Stewart
Art, living room
[paige-stewart.com](#)

Paul Briggs
Art, living room
[briggspictures.com](#)

Seer Studio
Table, living room
[seer-studio.com](#)

Sub-Zero
Appliances, kitchen
[subzero-wolf.com](#)

Vintage Bath
Backsplash tile, kitchen
[vintagebath.com](#)



The outdoor living space extends the functional reach of the new design.