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"There was a lot of history there," says Skurman. "Nothing was to look like it was new." "It's small and cozy," Tucker says of the library. "We didn't want a men's club feel." Jeune Femme au Chapeau Bleu, 1908, by Kees van Dongen is above the mantel. Armchair fabric, Brunschwig & Filis.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Suzanne Tucker Renovates a Country Home in San Francisco

The designer refreshed the residence—originally crafted by Julia Morgan—by uncovering classic elegance and a premier art collection

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Photography by Matthew Millman

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The past can be a tricky business. When a residence embodies the spirit of two formidable women—one, the architect Julia Morgan, and the other, a major San Francisco art collector—the notion of reinvention is not for the timid.

"Mother had the walls pickled to resemble oak in the 1970s," recalls the owner, who, along with her husband, inherited one of San Francisco's great apartments as well as one of the West Coast's premier art collections. "In the beginning we thought, We're not going to change this or that, but our thinking evolved. It's a process you go through."





The apartment—really a country manor in the sky—is located in a much-sought-after building overlooking the bay, in Pacific Heights. A study in classicism, the residence was designed by Morgan for a friend in the 1920s. The elegantly proportioned wood paneling in the living and dining rooms bespeaks Morgan's brilliance, as does the masterful plaster ceiling, a sinuous tangle of vines that comes alive with light.

"Interesting, strong women have touched this space," says designer Suzanne Tucker, of Tucker Marks, who collaborated with her longtime associate Kaidan Erwin. "It was a wonderful charge I'd been given."

The mother's art collection, which the owners have expanded, includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Robert Motherwell and Jasper Johns, and an extensive collection of antiques and pre-Columbian art. Although inheritance can be the stuff of fantasy (in theory), when an apartment has been inhabited for 30 years by one's mother, a major civic patron who put the Picasso here and the Jasper Johns there and switched decorators with some abandon, change can be intimidating. "We wanted to honor the fact that it was her mother's house," explains Tucker, a protégé of both John Fowler and Michael Taylor. "But the clients also needed to embrace the apartment as their own."





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"It was formal and didn't reflect the owners' taste for the country house look," designer Suzanne Tucker says of the apartment, originally designed by Julia Morgan, that she and architect Andrew Skurman renovated in San Francisco's Pacific Heights. The 1920s wood paneling in the living room was restained a honey walnut color. *Moonstruck*, 1949, by William Baziotos, is above the mantel. Stark fabric on pair of lounge chairs.

Rich in architectural detailing, the commodious quarters had always been a challenge; the daughter recalls her mother's "constantly fiddling" with the living room, placing furniture in corners. Its imposing proportions run counter to the couple's style—informal people of the sort who dote on their Australian cattle dog, Fergie. "The clients were very specific about wanting an at-home, country house kind of feel," Tucker says. "The challenge, particularly with the large living room, was how to make it intimate and cozy."

The couple hired San Francisco architect Andrew Skurman, known for his work with classical residences. The first priority, all agreed, was to preserve and restore Julia Morgan's English paneling, so fashionably pickled white by Michael Taylor in the '70s.



The wood was painstakingly stripped, bleached and restored to a pale honey walnut color, which provides visual warmth and holds its own against the harsh Northern California light (a glare that, let it be said, comes with panoramic views of the Golden Gate Bridge and beyond).

"It's unusual for Americans to inherit family artwork and furniture," says the architect, who transformed a glass-enclosed conservatory off the living room into a paneled seating niche, a favorite spot for reading the paper. "The history and tradition of the apartment make it very special."

Awkward spaces were reconfigured: The original library, for instance, long and narrow, was completely rebuilt, and the space was transformed into a new library and a guest room. Taking her cue from the Adamesque fireplace, Tucker added floral draperies and bamboo shades to the guest room, giving it the sipping-brandy-in-one's-slippers coziness of an English country house.

Some people change slipcovers with the seasons—here, it's Matisse (the owners rotate the artist's 20-piece *Jazz* series, displaying four at a time). Rethinking once-hallowed placement of art was liberating for the daughter. "We didn't want to hang things where my mother had hung them," she says. "That was part of the process of making it ours."

That fresh eye was enhanced by Tucker's selection of colors and fabrics, which gravitate toward buttery golden yellow hues. Furniture now comes in comforting groupings, which, the owner says, allows her "to be by myself padding around and not feel lost." Though the couple throw formal dinner parties for 18 with some regularity, they also enjoy having dinner together in blue jeans around the George III breakfast table.

The easy interplay between casual and formal is exemplified by the open flow between kitchen and dining room—the husband's idea. The dining room is anchored by an



English mahogany table and an antique Ushak rug; its foil in the kitchen is a linoleum floor with a classical border (most assume it's stone).

To an unusual degree, the redesign of the historic apartment was one of continual discovery—most notably, secret storage compartments designed by Julia Morgan that designer and clients were astonished to find concealed in the walnut paneling. Over time, Suzanne Tucker's renewed vision "progressed, and beautifully so," the client says of the apartment she had known intimately for 30 years. That which was frozen in amber has become a pearl.

