

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

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*Gone is the pipe organ of more than a century ago, when Bernard Maybeck designed the Arts and Crafts residence – the space it once occupied is now an intimate library leading off the living room. More or less contemporaneous with the architecture, give or take a year or two, a pendant lamp by Dagobert Peche for the Wiener Werkstätte hangs low from the vaulted ceiling*

# CRAFTS COUNSEL

The new owners of this early 20th-century house in California were no strangers to the architecture of Bernard Maybeck, having already restored an Arts and Crafts bungalow by him elsewhere in the state. Even so, they were still mighty glad of help from a triumvirate of advisors – including LA-based Commune Design – who expertly liberated its wood-panelled interior from acre on acre of whitewash. And also proposed adding denim and rush matting to their ceilings... Text: Carly Olson. Photography: Rich Stapleton





*Opposite: Roman Alonso, a partner at Commune Design, conceived the monolithic redwood fire surround in the living room, its corbels cleverly echoing Maybeck motifs found elsewhere. The artist Aaron Morse painted the mural adorning the arched recess above it. Below: the house's owners collect crystals, which are on display throughout – some monumental enough to befit a museum or art gallery*



When architect Bernard Maybeck travelled to Central California in 1916 to meet a new client, he encountered a landscape quite unlike the hilly Bay Area where he had spent most of his career. Inspecting the site of more than a dozen flat acres, he took in a striking vista of the Santa Ynez mountains to the east, noting how the ridge, often shrouded in fog, registered as a backdrop and considered what kind of house might hold its own there. The resulting structure was unusually expansive for the architect: a horizontal composition capped with intersecting gables that echoed the mountains beyond. The roofline was punctuated with large, geometric chimneys – a Maybeck signature – while stone and shingle cladding adhered

to his well-honed Arts and Crafts vocabulary. Inside, birch panelling and oversized pocket doors dissolved the boundary between indoors and out, creating a luminous interior. The living room, conceived as a venue for musical performances, featured a pipe organ and grand piano.

More than 100 years later when the current owners, a couple with two teenage daughters, visited for the first time, they were already attuned to Maybeck's work. Their first home as newlyweds had, improbably, been a bungalow in Northern California designed by him. They had restored it carefully, but outgrew it as their family enlarged. After they had sold it, news travelled back that the new occupants had begun an aggressive remodel, stripping away much of its original character.

'It felt criminal to us and we were devastated,' says one of its former custodians. 'I'm not sure we ever got over it.'

She and her husband weren't searching for another Maybeck when they moved to this area. In fact, they had begun designing a ground-up house just down the road. Through a chain of circumstances, they were invited to tour the property. Although the interiors had been painted white, they quickly observed similarities to their first home, but on a larger scale – the wood panelling, the proportions, the rhythm of the spaces. 'We immediately fell in love, felt at home and decided to pivot... to the restoration of yet another Maybeck,' she recalls.

This time, unlike their earlier restoration, the couple assembled a team to

shepherd their vision: Commune Design, with whom they had worked on other homes, the architect Marc Appleton, who is known for historically sensitive renovations, and the art adviser Allison Harding. Rather than recreate the original details entirely, all parties were guided by a hypothetical question: if these clients had commissioned Maybeck at the time, what might he have designed for them?

Using the Maybeck archives at UC Berkeley, Roman Alonso, a partner at Commune, reviewed early correspondence between the architect, the first owner and the contractor, treating the documents as orientation points. Harding shaped the art collection with a similar mindset, choosing works that echo early 20th-century ideas about nature

and craft. Outside, the landscape-design practice Terremoto rethought the broader grounds with drought-tolerant natives that suited the surrounding terrain.

By the time Maybeck was called on to construct the home in 1916, he was well established. Born in New York and educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, he belonged to the same generation of classically trained California architects as Julia Morgan, though his instincts were looser, more improvisational, sometimes theatrical. In Berkeley, he taught drawing and helped shape what would become the university's architecture programme. In San Francisco, he designed the Palace of Fine Arts for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, as well as a string of Arts and Crafts houses. Many consider

his masterpiece to be the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Berkeley, which is in that style but also bears Byzantine, Gothic and Romanesque influences.

Commune leaned into Maybeck's fondness for textiles, carved-wood detailing and asymmetry. Alonso toured some of the architect's surviving dwellings in Berkeley and combed the archives for clues about how he constructed rooms. 'His houses are full of quirk,' he says, citing the mix of different widths of trim within one room and the addition of velvet panels to doors. With those lessons in mind, the interiors took shape. The house unfolds in a series of generously scaled rooms wrapped in old-growth redwood, inspired by the original birch panelling. Alonso explains that the timber



*Above: in the kitchen's dining area, Josef Frank chairs circle a pedestal table made by Espenet Studio, a California woodworking outfit now run by its founder's son, the very aptly named Tripp Carpenter. The redwood-panelled gallery wall features paintings by artists Martha Shaw, Ellen Siebers and Maria Klabin. Opposite: to soften the acoustics, rush matting was added to the ceiling in the dining room, where Pierre Yovanovitch 'Flare' floor lamps provide most of the light – thus minimising the need for overhead fixtures*





*Above: redwood cladding extends to the main bathroom, save only for the tub area and shower enclosure, which are both lined with Malibu tiles. Hanging above the vanity unit is a nickel-framed mirror made by one of Roman Alonso's friends. Right: the owners commandeered what had been a gym as their bedroom, which entailed radical reconfiguring. The result, though, is unobstructed views of mountains*





was salvaged from California wildfire sites and milled by Arborica. 'Once you take the bark off those burned trees, the interior is intact,' he says. The effect is atmospheric, as the tall ceilings, earth tones and picture windows combine to create a sense of warmth that could almost fool you into thinking you were outdoors.

Some elements were restored directly. The sitting room, which leads off the foyer, remains the nucleus of the house. Here the egg-and-dart moulding, once painted over, re-emerged, along with floor inlays. Other areas were reimagined with a subtly modern wink; in that same room, for instance, Maybeck had originally upholstered the ceiling panels with blue velvet. 'We wanted something more casual. So we did it all in denim,' Alonso

says. From six metres below, the difference is almost indistinguishable, but the overall mood is entirely different.

Although the pipe organ has long gone, the owners, who play drums, guitar and the piano as well as sing, use this space both for quality time together and jam sessions. A grand piano holds court at one end, while off to the side, the former organ chamber is now a small library, an intimate counterpoint to the scale of the main space. Contemporary notes provide playful contrast, such as the bulbous Pierre Yovanovitch lamps in the dining room and foyer and, in the sitting room, an egg-shaped coffee table so big it could almost accommodate two slumbering people.

Redwood continues into the dining room, kitchen and main bedroom, with

unified lighting featuring European fixtures inspired by the family's travels. Alonso elected to avoid recessed cans almost entirely, instead letting the light stay low and warm, reflecting the natural rhythms of the world outside.

There, tucked at the property's edge, one pre-renovation element remains: a rose garden planted in the shape of a butterfly wing. Its low hedges trace the outline, holding dozens of old varieties. The air seems to hum with the same gentle rhythm that fills the rooms. Even in early winter, fat yellow roses are still unfurling, framed by citrus trees. To contact Commune Design, ring 001 310 855 9080, or visit [communedesign.com](http://communedesign.com). To contact Appleton Architects, ring 001 805 965 0304, or visit [appleton-architects.com](http://appleton-architects.com)



*Above: in one of the daughters' bedrooms, a Jens Risom 'Amoeba' coffee table for Knoll faces another Maybeck-style fireplace conjured from Alonso's imagination. Underfoot is a Doris Leslie Blau rug, while the floral wallcovering is by Mauny. Opposite: elsewhere, side tables inspired by the work of the artist/furniture-maker Roy McMakin flank a Commune custom-made bed. Overhead, miniature porcelain-and-glass globe light fittings by the New York-based MacLaren Fixture Co were installed to ensure a soft glow*

