



SEA RANCH

Striking a balance between reverence for the past and a focus on the future, Commune Design took a deep dive into the archives of Sea Ranch—a Californian icon—and discovered permission to play.

Commune Design principal Roman Alonso, who undertook the renovation of these homes in the famous Sea Ranch enclave, understood the project from the outset. “For generations of architects and designers, Sea Ranch occupied an almost unreal space in the collective imagination, becoming a pilgrimage site for many.” Stepping lightly across the coastal terrain, the 10 original rough-sawn redwood buildings had proposed a different version of Modernism—one that spoke to the vernacular of the area, to gabled roofs and exposed timber, to the clapboard cabins of the logging village that occupied the site a century earlier.

Working with the owners and Turnbull Griffin Haesloop Architects—a successor practice to the original—Commune began by bringing the two units back into conversation with one another and restore a shared architectural language. “We studied archival material and original details to understand not only how the buildings were made, but why certain decisions had been made,” he says.

Commune had always looked to Sea Ranch as a touchstone, a project it returned to repeatedly for inspiration, and so initially its reverential approach presented a custodial challenge—to conserve and intervene as little as possible. A sense of release came during the research stage, when it learned that the architecture was “adaptive, economical, and often improvisational”. The foundation was simple: locally available materials relating to place and context. Boards were cut with chainsaws, old-growth redwood intermingled with more common Douglas fir planks, and plywood was likely sourced from a hardware store. Nothing was overly precious.

“It reminded us that the original designers were responding to a place, working with what they had, and solving problems as they arose. That spirit became our guide,” Alonso says. “It got us out of our heads and reminded us to be designers, builders and problem solvers again.”

**SONOMA COUNTY, USA, Architecture TURNBULL GRIFFIN HAESLOOP ARCHITECTS,
Design COMMUNE DESIGN Photography STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON, Words EMMA ADAMS**



Previous page: Commune took the bold approach of moving away from the original all-timber interior and used colour to delineate internal forms. **This spread:** Originally designed by MLTW Architects and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin in the 1960s, Sea Ranch responds to its natural surrounds, following the terrain in a vernacular style that used local timbers.





“The palette came from Lawrence Halprin’s original landscape plans, and the colours were tested directly on wood because the grain fundamentally changes how paint is perceived.”

Much of the work to this point focused on bringing the units up to contemporary standards as invisibly as possible. Colour then became a way to redraw focus, to differentiate and update the interiors. “When redwood covers every surface, it can obscure the legibility of form and compete with the very architectural moves it is meant to articulate,” Alonso notes. Interior structures such as the bunk room became natural markers for delineating form through colour and revealing it anew.

“The clients weren’t looking for a vacation home they would visit once or twice a year. They wanted a place they could escape to often—a retreat that felt removed from city life but was still close enough to become part of their regular routine,” Alonso says. Conversations centred on how they wanted to live: being inside and outside, cooking, eating, playing, sleeping, spending time with family and friends. “Those everyday rituals became the foundation for the project.”

Supporting connection to place while accommodating everything that comes with family life meant thinking carefully about all of it—from the overall organisation of spaces to where a single utensil would live. “We wanted each element to feel purposeful, making daily life a little more intuitive and effortless. It needed to function beautifully and continue to be a source of joy and peace for the family.”

After some time living there, the clients revealed they had started looking at their primary residence differently, noticing all the everyday objects that lacked a natural place to land. In a way, living at Sea Ranch had changed how they thought about home itself. For Commune, Alonso says, working on the project felt like a “philosophical homecoming”. By drawing focus to the original structure through contrast, the spaces feel personal and relaxed, maintaining the original thinking and its continuous connection to landscape while imbuing it with a spirit of renewal.

This page: Maximising the double height of the dining space, a Japanese Kojima Shoten lantern hangs above an Eero Saarinen Tulip table surrounded by cheerful red CH24 Wishbone dining chairs by Hans J. Wegner. **Opposite page:** Modernist selections align with original built-in furniture and the sympathetic additions by Commune.







This page: A bedroom loft features a plaid rug—part of Commune’s collection for Christopher Farr—with a vibrant bedspread by Adam Pogue and a blue-and-biscuit-coloured gingham blanket by Marina Contro, both for Commune. A utilitarian canvas shade is repurposed as a canopy, creating a sense of nostalgia akin to an overnight stay in a wooded cabin or camping in nature. **Opposite page:** Rusticity is balanced by tailored, upholstered pieces alongside an iconic Eames lounge chair and a UF4-L5 Akari floor lamp by Isamu Noguchi.



This page: A custom daybed and bookcase paired with a sculpted coffee table by California-based artist Dan John Anderson continue the Sea Ranch tradition of interiors by contemporary makers. **Opposite page:** To connect the two units—each with kitchen, living and dining areas that are retained in the plan—a timber door at the end of a catwalk has been added. Here, the studio painted an arrow in the style of supergraphics artist Barbara Stauffacher Solomon in a respectful nod to the original graphics.







This page: In the second dining area, Model 3236 dining chairs by Børge Mogensen for Fredericia sit around the table, while a pendant by Adam Pogue hangs above. **Opposite page:** Painted surfaces reveal a series of spaces that are intended to read as furniture-like forms under a continuous gabled roof.





Clockwise from top: CH24 Wishbone chair in Soft Falu by Hans J. Wegner, re-edition by Ilse Crawford for Carl Hansen & Søn; *Abstract Paintings* by Steven Johanknecht from Commune Design Shop; Plaid rug by Commune Design for Christopher Farr; Damson limewash paint by Bauwerk; Hush Pine by Laminex; Eames lounge chair and ottoman in Walnut by Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller, upholstered in Checker by Alexander Girard for Maharam; Akari UF4-L8 floor lamp by Isamu Noguchi for Vitra; Wooden Doll, Mother & Child Fish by Alexander Girard for Vitra; floor cushion by Adam Pogue for Commune Design Shop; Eames Turned stool in Walnut, Shape A by Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller.