

A Masterpiece in
Northern California
by Frank Gehry

● Introducing the
Designers of the Year

Keep It AD100

PARADISE

FOUND

AT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S
ICONIC SEA RANCH,
HARD BY THE PACIFIC,
COMMUNE DESIGN HELPS A YOUNG CREATIVE
COUPLE MANIFEST THEIR DREAM OF
COASTAL BLISS

TEXT BY **MAYER RUS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON**

CONDOMINIUM 1, THE FIRST STRUCTURE BUILT AT THE SEA RANCH IN 1965, WAS DESIGNED BY ARCHITECTS CHARLES MOORE, DONLYN LYNDON, WILLIAM TURNBULL JR., AND RICHARD WHITAKER ON A SITE MASTER-PLANNED BY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT LAWRENCE HALPRIN.

Forget about Pinterest boards and magazine clippings. The design brief that Mike and Sharon Matas compiled at the outset of their Sea Ranch odyssey delivers a veritable master class in the art of communicating intent, philosophy, and aesthetic direction. Peppered with archival drawings of The Sea Ranch, quotations from the utopian community's founding architects, and evocative family photographs, the document eloquently illuminates the Matases' vision for their seaside idyll. Sections of the introspective manifesto include How We Rest, How We Play, How We Eat, and Bringing the Outside In. The brief concludes with a quote by architect Charles Moore that neatly sums up the essence of the couple's endeavor: "The Sea Ranch has been my Mother Earth, a place where I have gone, and continue to go, to have my energy and spirit rekindled."

"Mike and Sharon dove deep into research, and they were involved in every aspect of the process, from the conceptual approach to the smallest piece of hardware," says Roman Alonso of Commune Design, the AD100 firm tasked with realizing the Matases' mandate. "They were determined to honor the form



MIKE MATAS AND DAUGHTER JUNE PLAY A BOARD GAME ON A CUSTOM DAYBED THAT CAN BE ENCLOSED WITH PULL-DOWN SHADES ON TWO SIDES. A VINTAGE EAMES LOUNGE IS COVERED IN AN ALEXANDER GIRARD FABRIC FROM MAHARAM. CUSTOM OTTOMAN (LEFT) BY ADAM POGUE FOR COMMUNE. OPPOSITE COLOR BLOCKING DEFINES THE CENTRAL ARCHITECTURAL VOLUME AND THE FLOATING BEDROOM.



LEFT JUNE (ABOVE) AND OLIVE MAKE THE MOST OF THE ADVENTUROUS ARCHITECTURE. OPPOSITE A SYSTEM OF CANVAS SHADES MEDIATES THE PRIMARY BEDROOM'S EXPOSURE. BED AND SIDE TABLES BY NOAH COHEN, CARPET BY COMMUNE FOR CHRISTOPHER FARR, BEDSPREAD BY ADAM POGUE, BLANKET BY MARINA CONTRO, AND TABLE LAMPS BY BILL CURRY DESIGN LINE.

and spirit of the original architecture, so we couldn't veer far from what was there when this place was conceived. The project wasn't a purely orthodox restoration, but it was far more faithful than an ordinary renovation. Let's call it a resto-vation."

The Matases had been visiting The Sea Ranch—a quietly radical planned community that sprang up in the 1960s along 10 miles of breathtaking Northern California coastline—for roughly a decade when the opportunity arose to acquire their own slice of heaven. During the COVID pandemic, they purchased two adjacent units in Condominium 1, the first development erected on the property, which was designed by Moore along with fellow

architects Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull Jr., and Richard Whitaker. In keeping with their do-no-harm edict, the couple decided to preserve the two units as discrete entities, each with its own living room, dining area, kitchen, and sleeping quarters. There is only one point of connection, a camouflaged sliding door that joins the lower level of the first home to the upper level of the second, a condition facilitated by the angle of the hillside site.

"We like that it's a little uncomfortable navigating the units. It's almost as if you're going camping," states Mike Matas, an entrepreneur and designer at LoveFrom, Jony Ive's creative collective. "The experience isn't about luxury. Nothing is



"IF YOU TRY TO MODERNIZE THESE SPACES, YOU BASICALLY DESTROY THEM. THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE HERE IS TO EMBRACE THE ORIGINAL IDEAS," SAYS COMMUNE'S ROMAN ALONSO.

EACH OF THE TWO CONJOINED UNITS HAS ITS OWN DINING ROOM, LIVING AREA, KITCHEN, AND SLEEPING QUARTERS. HERE, HANS WEGNER CHAIRS SURROUND AN EERO SAARINEN TABLE BENEATH A PAPER-AND-BAMBOO LANTERN BY KOJIMA SHOTEN. ARTWORK BY SHARON MATAS.



ABOVE IN THE SECOND LIVING ROOM, A WALL LIGHT BY J.J.M. HOOGERVORST HANGS ABOVE A CUSTOM COCKTAIL TABLE AND DAYBED. RIGHT MIKE AND SHARON MATAS REST OUTSIDE THE GIRLS' BUNK ROOM.



overly polished. You have to work your way through the spaces, which is part of the fun,” adds his wife, Sharon, a designer and illustrator, hailing the puzzle-like quality of the architecture.

Although one of the units remained largely intact when the Matases found it, the second had fallen victim to an ill-conceived 1990s renovation that included such unseemly details as glass railings. “If you try to modernize these spaces, you basically destroy them. The only way to live here in a sensible way is to embrace the original ideas,” Alonso insists. To ensure their remedial efforts remained true to the Sea Ranch ethos, Commune collaborated with Eric Haesloop of Turnbull Griffin Haesloop Architects, the successor firm to William Turnbull Associates. “In some ways this was an academic project. Commune is serious about history and research, and they were open to wherever it led,” Mike recalls.

Aside from the architectural rehabilitation of the bastardized unit, many of the changes implemented by Commune involved upgrading materials and finishes: substituting fiberglass with Corian in the showers, for instance, and reengineering the system of shades and canopies that allows the homeowners to modulate the

degree of privacy and exposure in places like the floating loft bedroom. Taking cues from archival images and extant details in other Sea Ranch homes—notably Charles Moore’s own unit in Condominium 1—the Commune team also introduced serious jolts of color, deploying custom hues derived from the lavish landscape and Pacific waters to define specific architectural volumes. “When everything is natural cedar, it can look like a bit of a jumble. The colors give shape to the architecture so that you can discern the geometries,” Alonso explains.

The great success of the Matases’ painstaking restoration lies in its seeming ease and inevitability. “In the end, you can’t really tell what’s old and what’s new. But it’s not disingenuous—we weren’t trying to create a museum piece from 1965. Everything feels honest and true to who we are and how we live,” Mike muses. “We weave indoors and out throughout the day, so we feel genuinely connected to the land,” Sharon adds. “Our home brings another dimension, another perspective to the rituals of our daily lives. You feel like you’ve been teleported to an entirely different place.” And that, of course, is the magic of The Sea Ranch. **AD**

ART: SHARON MATAS

DESIGN NOTES

THE DETAILS THAT MAKE THE LOOK

MALMO CHECK TEXTILE
BY COMMUNE FOR
KUFRI; \$210 PER YARD.
KUFRI.LIFEFABRICS.COM

RIM SERVING PLATTER
BY COMMUNE FOR
HEATH CERAMICS; \$163.
HEATHCERAMICS.COM

BIG PLAID RUG BY
COMMUNE FOR
CHRISTOPHER
FARR; \$155 PER
SQUARE FOOT.
CHRISTOPHERFARR.COM

“ We weren’t trying to create a museum
piece from 1965. Everything feels honest
and true to who we are and how we live. ”
—homeowner *Mike Matas*

IN THE OFFICE/GUEST ROOM
ADJOINING THE GIRLS’
BUILT-IN BUNK ROOM, ADAM
POGUE FLOOR CUSHIONS
SIT ON A RUG BY COMMUNE
FOR CHRISTOPHER FARR.

CHECKER FABRIC
BY ALEXANDER
GIRARD FOR
MAHARAM; \$157
PER YARD.
MAHARAM.COM

JUNE (RIGHT) AND
OLIVE PLAY CHESS ON
A BESPOKE BOARD BY
ARTIST DAVID O’BRIEN,
SURROUNDED BY ADAM
POGUE FLOOR CUSHIONS
FOR COMMUNE.

AKARI UF4-L5 LIGHT
SCULPTURE BY
ISAMU NOGUCHI;
\$1,300.
SHOP.NOGUCHI.ORG

WISHBONE CHAIR BY
CARL HANSEN & SØN;
\$795. DWR.COM

MARBLE BOOKENDS BY
MATTHEW FISHER FOR
COMMUNE; \$700.
COMMUNEDESIGN.SHOP

LUMBAR PILLOW BY
ADAM POGUE FOR
COMMUNE; \$1,175.
COMMUNEDESIGN.SHOP

LIGHTER COZY, SPLASH VOTIVE,
AND CANDLE SNUFFER BY LISA
EISNER FOR COMMUNE; FROM
\$600. COMMUNEDESIGN.SHOP

SAGE CUPS BY JB BLUNK; \$340 FOR A
SET OF 4. COMMUNEDESIGN.SHOP

TABLE LAMP BY
DAVID CRESSEY FOR
ARCHITECTURAL
POTTERY; \$2,200.
1STDIBS.COM