

MAGAZINE

# Inside a Vibrant Abode Where California Cool Meets the Scandinavian Summer Home

Local craftwork invokes the bohemian spirit of West Marin in this Commune  
Design remodel

By Mayer Rus, Photography by Laure Joliet

March 18, 2024



The fireplace elevation is clad in glass mosaic tiles by Theodore Ellison Designs in a bronze surround by Chris French Metal. Hans Wegner rocking chair, JB Blunk stool and side table, Adam Pogue ottoman, Gino Sarfatti ceiling light, and rug by Commune for Christopher Farr.

At its heart, this project is a love letter to Northern California's West Marin region—a paean to the area's history, landscape, craft traditions, and bohemian soul. Alex Riley, a prominent local designer and poet of organic architecture, built the original 1,000-square-foot house for himself in the 1960s. When the property changed hands

in the late 1980s, Riley added a primary suite and a compact guest cottage for the new owners, evolving his signature design language of clerestories and trusses. “Our challenge was to pick up the thread where Alex left it, to honor the architecture while giving the home a fresh spirit and purpose,” says Commune Design’s Roman Alonso, the designer entrusted to renovate the house for its current owners, a pair of creative polymaths and philanthropists active in the arenas of design, food, and film. “They wanted to lean into the West Marin vibe, but they also wanted surprises in color, pattern, and decorative layers,” he adds.

Fortunately, Alonso possesses a true affinity for this part of the country and a deep appreciation of its strange magic.



Armchairs by [Josef Frank for Svenskt Tenn](#) pull up to a walnut dining table by [Tripp Carpenter](#) beneath an antique [Tiffany Studios](#) pendant lamp. The ceiling is covered in woven rush by [Rush Matters](#). Sisal rug by [Stark](#). Art: Steven Johanknecht/Commune Design.



1930s Original Tiffany-Style Glass Flower Pendant Light

**\$3,800**  
**CHAIRISH**



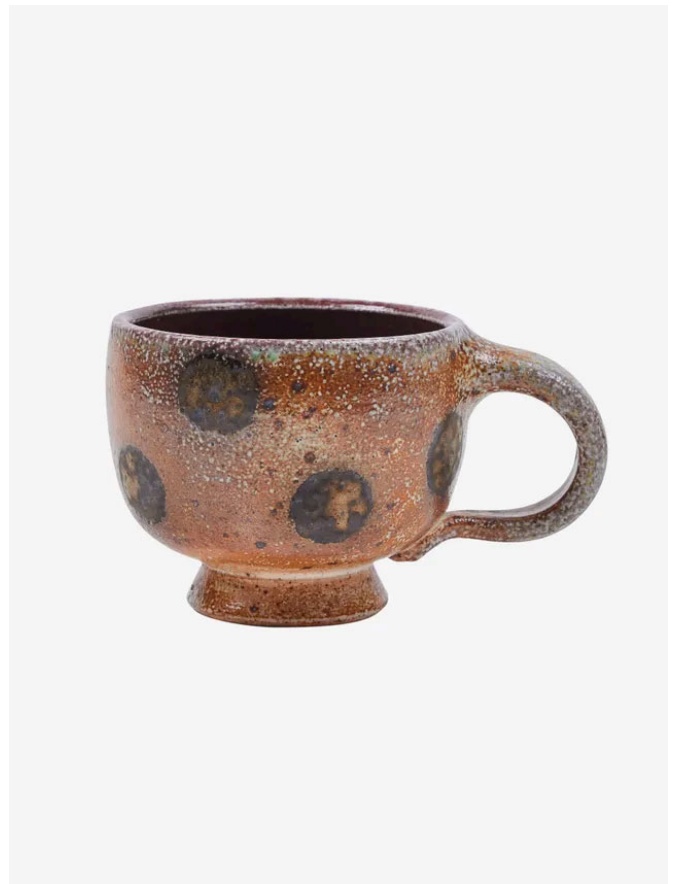
Eldblomman Wallpaper by Josef Frank for Svenskt Tenn

**\$200**  
**SVENSKT TENN**



Fluted Pitcher by Zoe Dering

\$600  
COMMUNE



Mug by Whitman Shenk

\$100  
COMMUNE

Northern California's fertile design heritage and progressive cultural climate have been a lodestar for Commune since the inception of the practice, and many of the firm's most trusted collaborators and craftspeople hail from the region. Their collective talents are on full, vibrant display throughout the home. Oakland-based Theodore Ellison created the vivid glass rondels that adorn the front door and bath screen, as well as the glass mosaic tiles that clad the fireplace. The dining table was lovingly crafted by Tripp Carpenter, son of the great furniture maker and Bolinas pillar Arthur Espenet Carpenter. There are fields of Heath Ceramics tile, JB Blunk sculptures, an Ido Yoshimoto cocktail table, and redwood lounge chairs by Jesse Schlesinger. The artwork on the walls buoys the site-specific mood, with pieces by Lena Wolff, Kelly Ording, Ruth Charlotte Kneass, and other artists based in and around the Bay Area. Altogether, it's a celebration of the best of the Golden State, past and present.

The decorative party, however, is not reserved exclusively for denizens of California. “We wanted to explore the connection between West Marin and Scandinavian summer homes, another one of our obsessions,” Alonso says. “This house felt like the perfect place for JB Blunk and Edith Heath to finally meet Josef Frank face-to-face.” The designer underscored the aesthetic kinship by deploying classic Danish chairs by Hans Wegner and Ole Wanscher; Swedish flat-weave carpets; Arne Jacobsen fixtures; and a dizzying array of Frank wallpapers, fabrics, and furnishings for Svenskt Tenn. A select number of pieces that fall outside the Scandi/Cali range—bulbous light fixtures by Gino Sarfatti, an antique Tiffany Studios pendant lamp, wallpaper by British designer Marthe Armitage—pepper the playful mix.



The view from the entry looks through the house and out to the West Marin landscape.





Redwood Stool by Bruce Mitchell for Commune

\$8,000  
COMMUNE



Assamese Cotton Jacquard Blanket With Ikat Binding

\$450  
GREGORY PARKINSON



Asturias Lounge Chair by Carlos Motta

SHOP AT  
ESPASSO



Half Pile Swedish Rug by Doris Leslie Blau

\$8,000  
1STDIBS

The riot of color and pattern coalesces with particular charm in two snug bedrooms positioned along the central corridor that leads from the front door through the house and out to a spectacular view of the West Marin landscape, highlighted by a majestic bishop pine. The rooms are wrapped in joyous Frank wallpapers, but whereas most designers would let the patterns suffice for ecstatic decor, Commune chose a different approach—too much is never enough. Alonso paired the wallpapers with upholstered patchwork headboards by textile artist Adam Pogue, custom polychromatic bedding, and color-blocked Swedish carpets. Instead of cacophony, the effect is surprisingly warm and serene.

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Sea Urchin Incense Holder by Lisa Eisner for Commune

\$600  
COMMUNE

Commune set the stage for this kaleidoscopic, multicultural mash-up with strategic interventions and alterations to existing finishes within the home. They stained the floors in what Alonso describes as a “weird, deep blue-green color,” refinished all the interior cedar siding to temper the wood’s orangey hue, and painted the columns,

trusses, and trim in dark green, effectively heightening the drama of Riley’s architectural composition. In further deference to Riley’s work, all of Commune’s newly added mahogany bookshelves, cabinetry, and other millwork details were extrapolated from an original built-in hutch in the dining room, an area the designers divided to create an anteroom earmarked for casual repose. “The clients wanted lots of nooks and daybeds and perches to read and relax,” Alonso explains. “That’s the spirit of this place—rest, renewal, well-being.”



The primary bedroom has a [Tomlinson Woodworks](#) walnut side table, curtains and table lampshade by Josef Frank for Svenskt Tenn, a Swedish flat-weave rug by [Doris Leslie Blau](#), and a bedcover by Adam Pogue. Artworks by [Lena Wolff](#) (above bed) and [Ruth Charlotte Kneass](#) (mobile). Art: © Lena Wolff/Sarah Shepard Gallery. Ruth Charlotte Kneass.



The primary bath is outfitted with a [John Wigmore](#) light box, wallpaper by [Marthe Armitage](#), [Heath Ceramics](#) tile, and a glass screen by Theodore Ellison Designs.



Pillow by Adam Pogue for Commune

\$975  
COMMUNE



Claw Table Lamp

SHOP AT  
CHARLES EDWARDS

Commune's design ultimately walks the line between traditional and modern with aplomb, satisfying the predilections of clients whose tastes tend to hew in different directions.

“There’s a genuine harmony here, not just among the furniture and the luscious fabrics and wallpapers but in all the relationships we cultivated with the craftspeople, fabricators, and even the people at the auction houses,” one of the homeowners attests. “This house is our favorite place to think, recharge, listen to records, and be in love.”

*This Commune Design remodel appears in the AD's April 2024 issue. Never miss an issue when you subscribe to AD.*

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1/15

The window in the front door has glass rondels by [Theodore Ellison Designs](#). Demilune table by [Brian Persico](#). Drypoint print by [Robert Kipniss](#) (above table); painting by [Kelly Ording](#).



2/15

The view from the entry looks through the house and out to the West Marin landscape.



3/15

The open kitchen is perched a few steps above the living room. Sink fittings by Vola.





4/15

The fireplace elevation is clad in glass mosaic tiles by Theodore Ellison Designs in a bronze surround by [Chris French Metal](#). [Hans Wegner](#) rocking chair, [JB Blunk](#) stool and side table, [Adam Pogue](#) ottoman, [Gino Sarfatti](#) ceiling light, and rug by [Commune for Christopher Farr](#).



5/15

A custom Nickey Kehoe wood bench occupies a corner of the living room.



Art: Gianluca Franzese

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In the living room, a custom sectional sofa and walnut cocktail table rest on a rug by Commune for Christopher Farr. Blanket by Gregory Parkinson. Painting by Gianluca Franzese.



Commune Design carved out a comfortable anteroom to the dining area for lounging and playing records.



Art: Steven Johanknecht/Commune Design.

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9/15

The primary bedroom has a Tomlinson Woodworks walnut side table, curtains and table lampshade by Josef Frank for Svenskt Tenn, a Swedish flat-weave rug by Doris Leslie Blau, and a bedcover by Adam Pogue. Artworks by Lena Wolff (above bed) and Ruth Charlotte Kneass (mobile).



The primary bath is outfitted with a [John Wigmore](#) light box, wallpaper by [Marthe Armitage](#), [Heath Ceramics](#) tile, and a glass screen by Theodore Ellison Designs.



A cozy bedroom is enrobed in Josef Frank wallpaper for Svenskt Tenn. Upholstered headboard by Adam Pogue and bedding by Studio Ford and FREECITY for Commune. Paintings above bed by Samuel Hung.





A bath featuring Heath Ceramics tile and a custom shower curtain of a Josef Frank fabric for Svenskt Tenn.



A custom tufted daybed occupies a corner of the guesthouse bedroom. Pillows by Gregory Parkinson, side table by Bruce Mitchell for Commune, and desk chair by Josef Frank for Svenskt Tenn. Painting by John David Anderson.



A bedroom is outfitted with a Josef Frank wallpaper for Svenskt Tenn, an Adam Pogue headboard, and bedding by Studio Ford for Commune.



15/15

Overlooking a stately Bishop pine, the deck is furnished with a dining table, benches, and cocktail table by [Ten10](#) and redwood lounge chairs by [Jesse Schlesinger](#).

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[Mayer Rus](#) is West Coast editor of *Architectural Digest*, where he is responsible for tracking the work of established designers and emerging talents. During his career, he has crusaded for greater public awareness of design by reinforcing links between the design world and broader movements in business, politics, popular culture... [Read more](#)

West Coast Editor