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# learning curve

Trusting her designer's insight, this  
California homeowner graduated to a new style.

Nancy Rothman and designer Daen Scheiber, *above*, are close friends since collaborating on two previous houses. With this contemporary home, Nancy trusted Scheiber to lead her through uncharted design territory.

The windows and high ceilings *far right*, plus Scheiber's enthusiasm, persuaded Nancy to buy the house. Tucked under wood valances, sheer draperies draw back for maximum sunlight. Alligator-pattern sofa pillows add whimsical, colorful touches.

The L-shape house, with its walls of windows and two sets of large French doors, hugs the patio *right* and makes it an extension of everyday living.



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## learning curve

The growing collection of mid-century architecture books is a telltale sign that there's a student of design in the house. Those books have led the devotee, Nancy Rothman, to a whole new style of living in her home in the San Francisco Bay area.

"My favorite period, to tell the truth, is from 1930s Deco to the '50s. I love the styles of the '20s, too, but I prefer to live in a later-style house," Nancy says.

These recent preferences were formed after she plunged into learning about post-World War II design by purchasing a 1950s hillside-hugging, one-level, contemporary house that had walked into the '90s virtually unaltered.

A real estate agent by profession, Nancy initially staked out the house with an investor's eye. Her modus operandi is to live in a house for a few years, fix it up and decorate it, then sell it in a welcoming market. Risk-taking is not in the formula.

"My first impression from the street was, *This is absolutely awful*," she says. "From the street to the front door, I thought, *This is disgusting*. But when I walked in the front door, everything changed. I went with another real estate agent and said to her, 'I think this could be fabulous.'"

Before making a purchase, however, Nancy wanted her friend, designer Daen (pronounced Dane) Scheiber, to provide the final opinion. After all, they had successfully collaborated on her previous two purchases.

Those homes, however, had been traditional bungalows, and this was new territory. Touring the house the next day, he took in its weak floor plan with doors and partitions in odd places, its overgrown landscape, neglected interiors, huge windows, and high ceilings, and decided it definitely had potential. "Even though it was dismal, it was really cool," Scheiber says.

He told Nancy to buy it then pay attention and follow his lead. "And I did," Nancy says, laughing.

After a wall was removed, the dining room *above* became more open and accessible. Eclectic furniture, such as the new glass-top Italian table and heirloom mahogany chest, reside easily together in the neutral, architectural environment.

The living room *left* embodies Nancy and Scheiber's teamwork. She found the sectional, coffee table, and chair. He chose the upholstery and the rug, and he designed the window treatment and the washed-birch shelving.





“This contemporary direction was entirely new,” Nancy says.  
 “Since I trusted Daen so much, I came to love it.”

## learning curve

“Nancy’s a natural-born developer,” Scheiber says. “Every place she buys seems to suit her well. She can’t stand to just move her old stuff in. We have to start [decorating] right away.” This thorough understanding of his client’s temperament is what makes Scheiber and Nancy’s relationship so trusting despite their different backgrounds.

Scheiber is a longtime Moderne style lover. He cut his teeth designing his parents’ low-slung ’50s-style house in rural California, redoing their living

room when he was 9 years old. “In a good year with the crops, we would start expanding the house, and I would always get to design it,” he says. “Design is all I ever wanted to do, ever since I was a little kid. Every term paper, every essay in school was about design.”

Nancy grew up in an East Coast colonial house that gave her a design appreciation perpendicular to Scheiber’s. “I believed that houses should be two-story, old, and filled with antiques. As I spent more time in California, I started to see the benefits of one-story homes,” Nancy says.



The master bedroom *above* houses a mixture of pieces—from a mohair-covered estate-sale chair to a custom Spanish-style cabinet.



Scheiber tweaked the dramatic long hallway skirting the patio *opposite* to its full potential by moving and removing some doorways.

Decorated in shades of white, the master bedroom *left* is subtle and serene. Flanking the bed Scheiber designed are iconic 1920s side tables by Eileen Gray, one of his idols.

Nancy has a new appreciation for one-level homes. (See plan, *below*.) She says she uses the space more efficiently because it’s more accessible.

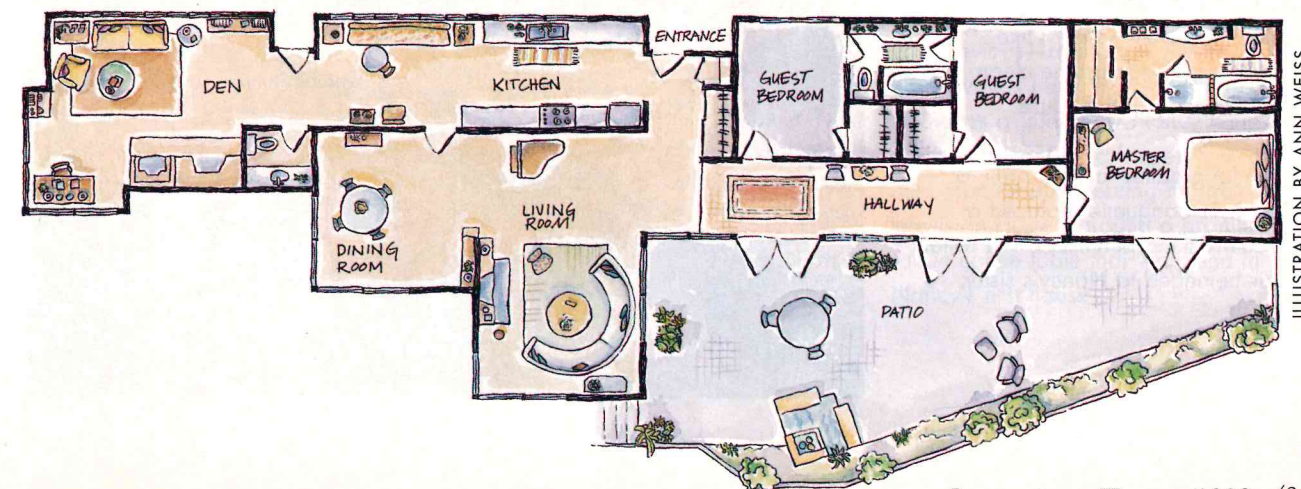


ILLUSTRATION BY ANN WEISS



## learning curve

kept things simple and uncluttered, repeating elements from room to room, such as wood floors, wall color, and birch shelving.

The furnishings have the clean lines and neutral, textural fabrics of today, with occasional statement pieces referring to the Moderne era.

Undressed or understatedly treated with straight fabric panels, the house's nearly floor-to-ceiling original windows frame views of a wooded ravine. Scheiber positioned a rustic desk in front of a window in the den because of the distraction nature provides; he thinks Nancy works too hard, and he wanted the house to be as restful and comfortable as possible.

Part of Nancy's comfort is to be surrounded by favorite furnishings, so Scheiber's design makes her father's piano a focal point in the living room.



"They're open, airy, and less cut up. In this one, for example, I find that I use space more because I can see it. I also like the indoor/outdoor access they [one-story homes] provide."

Access to the outdoors is a big selling point in the bug-free and beautiful San Francisco Bay area. And in this house, Nancy and Scheiber loved the long hallway that opens onto the back patio and connects the living room to the bedrooms. After moving or eliminating some interior doorways, Scheiber made the hall a more useful gallery, with wall space for furniture. He paved the hall floor and the patio with the same

Overlooking a wooded ravine, the rustic desk *above* is a departure from the other furnishings in the whole house. "Nancy and I have always liked these primitive French farm tables," Scheiber says. "I like juxtaposing it against the clean, Moderne lines of the house."

In the long galley kitchen *right*, a diner-style banquette replaced a space-breaking peninsula. The rattan chair belonged to Nancy's sister.

travertine tiles to blur the line between indoors and out. Nancy entertains on the patio frequently and leaves the doors open year-round.

For the remainder of the house, Scheiber followed tenets of good contemporary design, opting for a subtle rather than dramatic scheme. He



Other family pieces, such as the mahogany five-drawer dresser and some of her sister's rattan collection receive places of honor.

In fact, nostalgia rings throughout the house. Memories live in family heirlooms, while new furnishings, such as the curved sectional sofa and Nancy's bed, hark back to Nancy's and Daen's childhoods. "The sofa I bought for my mother [for her living room back in the '50s] had the exact same tapered

square legs as the bed I designed for Nancy," he says.

But with all this reflection, the home still faces the future. And so do Nancy and Scheiber. A new house with more lessons could be in store. For now, though, Nancy is uncharacteristically content. "I feel like I'm living in a resort. This house calms me down," she says. "I'm surprised at how much it makes me happy." □

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The previous—and original—homeowners used this corner room *above* as a studio; for Nancy it makes an inviting spot for a home office and den. Comfortable seating for watching television clusters around a granite-top rattan coffee table that was used in Nancy's first house.