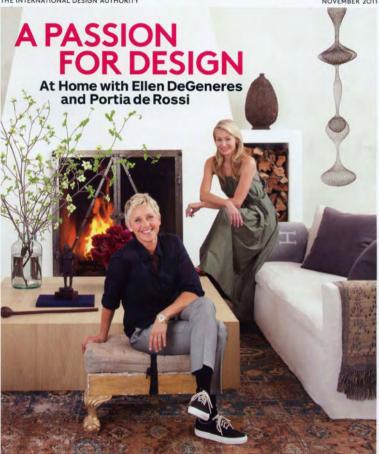
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST



Rus, Mayer. "Power Play." Architectural Digest, November 2011.

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POWER PLAY

Exquisite works of art and design achieve striking equilibrium in a Bay Area residence by interior decorator Steven Volpe and architect Lewis Butler

TEXT BY MAYER RUS PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSOHN PRODUCED BY HOWARD CHRISTIAN



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beckoned consumers with the indelible slogan, If you want to capture someone's attention, whisper. The quietly radical house just south of San Francisco that Butler Armsden Architects and Steven Volpe Design remodeled and decorated for a tech-sector titan operates on the same principle. It declares, sorto voce, that the boundary lines traditionally drawn between art and design are not merely permeable but irrelevant—that exceptional works of high design must be accorded the same respect and value as fine art.

"I was trying to create something that makes an impact, something that people haven't seen before," Volpe says. "To have a client who allows you to work through a process in which you're not sure where you're going to end up is incredibly rare."

A tour of the single-story residence offers a primer on the current state of avant-garde design as well as an in-depth look at some masters of the previous century. Strategically placed throughout are major pieces by Zaha Hadid, Marc Newson, Mattia Bonetti, and brothers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, alongside stellar works by Joris Laarman, Christophe Côme, Emmanuel Babled, and a host of midcentury French and Italian designers. It's an all-star lineup.

"We made trips to the Art Basel fair and places like David Gill's gallery in London so the client and his wife could see the works up close and appreciate just how extraordinary they are," Volpe says. "I had done houses for him previously, so I didn't have to sell him on a concept. I just showed him beautiful things."

Each remarkable item has its own story, Newson's Voronoi shelf, a matrix of cells carved from a single block of gray Bardiglio marble, required reinforcement of the floor in the lounge to carry its weight; Volpe buttressed the floor in several locations to allow for different placements of the massive piece. Hadid's Dune table was originally offered only in orange or green lacquer. Volpe asked the famously fastidious architect to have the piece fabricated in a mattee-white finish—and at first the answer was no. Eventually, however, Hadid relented, setting off a months-long quest by Volpe to secure the ideal white and the ideal matte texture.

What's most striking about Volpe's compositions is the ease with which formidable sculptural objects and artworks occupy the same rooms without flaunting their pedigrees or jostling for center stage. The atmosphere of peaceful, unexpectedly casual harmony is a function of the designer's restrained color palette—whites, grays, silver, and the occasional hit of pale purple (which he jokingly describes as "prune crême")—as well as the subtle correspondences he creates in each room. 'Is spent a year looking for the perfect counterpoint for the Zaha table before I found a Raphael sideboard," Volpe says. "It's a balancing act; one misstep throws everything off!"

The original house, built by a developer in 1996, had grand interior spaces, high ceilings, a central hall, and Doric columns arrayed along the façade—all solid virtues for a place meant to accommodate important objets de vertu. The materials, finishes, and detailing, however, required significant upgrades to conform to the quality and ambition of the new owner's collection. "It was basically a stucco box that had put a classical outfit on," explains architect Lewis Butler. "We took it all down to the wood frame and foundation and rebuilt it by enhancing the proportions and stature of its existing style and exploring the intersection of classicism and modernism. This house nods to the past but lives in the present."

The new entry boasts a pair of Carlo Scarpa-inspired gated doors that open onto an ethereal central hall-cury-gallery. This space perhaps best represents Volpe's vision of sublime balance and a mutually ennobling détente between art and design. Anish Kapoor's As Yet Untitled, a shimmering concave disk comprising hundreds of reflection-fracturing bexagonal mirrors, commands one wall. On the opposing wall, You Fade to Light, an interactive OLED (organic light-emitting diode) installation by the London-based design collective Random International, produces its own compelling meditation on mirroring and movement. An imposing table by Belgian designer Ado Chale with a top of inlaid hematite and lapis on a steel base holds the center of the room. Anchoring this ballet of reflective surfaces is a patchwork floor—as elegant as the finest silk carpet—of Spanish limestone with honed, brushed, scored, and bush-hammered finishes.

"We created an environment that's more than a façade of luxury," Volpe says. "It's like a solid-hardwood door versus a laminate one. This house has integrity and beauty all the way through." to

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Clockwise from top: The lounge includes a pair of 19/0s. French chairs by Marc du Plantier, a black marble mantel by Asel Verwoordt, twin '50s floor lamps by Gino Sarfatti, a restored circa-1915 pool table from Blatt Billiards, and a photograph by Richard Learoyd: the rug was custom made by VSosko. Marc Newson's spongelise Voronoi shelf stands next to the central hall. In the Bizrary, a midcentury Italian chandeler by Stillowova and club chairs by Verwoordt in a velvet from Claremont join a marble cocktail table by Joris Laurman and 1908 FontanaArte mirror; at left is a circa-1970 Malson Jansen writing table.

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Clockwise from left: The great room features vintage pendant lamps from Wyeth, an untitled Wayne Gonzales painting, a Corian-top steel table by Martin Szekely, custom-made chairs by Roman Thomas, and a '50s sideboard by T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings for Widdicomb. The pillows on the terrace furniture are made from Hermes terry towels; the sculpture, WT, is by Tony Cragg. The kitchen mixes bleached-walnut and lacquered cabinetry; the sink fittings are by Dornbracht, the range is by La Cornue, the backsplash tile is by Waterworks, and the stools are by BDDW. The window shades in the great room are by Conrad.



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