

Finding Aesthetic Balance

AN UNLIKELY PAIRING OF MODERN AND FOUND ART IN SAN FRANCISCO

Interior Design by James Marzo
Text by Patricia Leigh Brown
Photography by Mary E. Nichols

"She's very secure in her taste," James Marzo says of a client whose San Francisco residence he decorated. RIGHT: Rodin's *The Shade* shares space in the living room with an old bleached whale vertebra, which sits on a stadium turnstile from England. Sofa fabric from Cowtan & Tout. Stark daybed fabrics. Armchair silk velvet, Kirk Brummel.





An early-20th-century Neoclassical palazzo filled with Rodins in San Francisco seems an unlikely place to encounter a new twist on the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, it takes considerable gumption and a dead-on eye to know that cast-iron machinery parts and discarded turnstiles from an English soccer stadium will look absolutely smashing with one's Rodins, Chagalls and Monets.

"I said, 'I'm very difficult and very opinionated, and I have these very different things that I am absolutely determined to

put into my home,' the client says of her first meeting with designer James Marzo, in which she divulged her passion for salvaged industrial objects—what she calls heavy metal. "It was a marriage of the minds."

Was it telepathy? Fate? Dumb luck? What were the chances of this client's meeting a designer who not only appreciated her penchant for industrial objects but also collected them himself? (Of the pieces in his own house, Marzo is partial to the rusted jet turbine he uses as a low table and a set of cast-iron glove-manufacturing stands, which he describes as "tables as elegant as any 18th-century gueridon and far more cool.")

"It doesn't matter to me if something comes from an old factory or the finest gallery in Paris or London," Marzo is fond of saying. "There is a profound joy in finding beauty in unexpected places."

Cultivating the unexpected was a mantra for their work on the residence, which, except for the stunning views of the bay, was "very ordinary" when the client first encountered it. The bold approach represented a notable change of heart: She had previously lived in a traditional house filled with museum-quality English antiques. "I was really ready to break out with something different," explains the resident, who was born in England and perspicaciously snapped up the cast-iron turnstiles on King's Road a decade ago.

The starting point was the major Modern art collection that she had assembled over the years—a self-portrait by



LEFT: In a corner of the living room, Marzo (above left) put an Alison Berger cast-glass-and-bronze side table, from Holly Hunt, next to a Fritz Henningsen leather armchair. "Both Jim and I have a love of sculptural pieces," notes the client. A cast-iron English cobbler's bench is used as a side table.



Monet's self-portrait inspired the library's cinnabar walls. The André Arbus armchairs are circa 1930. Marzo created a number of the furnishings, including the pendant light fixture and the shagreen-and-bronze center table, that complement the eclectic art collection.

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Monet, drawings by Edgar Degas, posters by Toulouse-Lautrec and numerous sculptures by Henry Moore and Auguste Rodin, among others, including Rodin's *The Shade*, a figurative bronze with a bent and muscular torso whose visual power now anchors the living room.

Art of this caliber can serve as a kind of "straight man" for an interior—a George Burns,

if you will, that allows for the presence of a Gracie Allen. The residence is infused with juxtapositions that subtly tweak convention, a heady mix of "high" and "low," blending A-list art with objects of humble provenance. In the living room, for instance, a crescent-shaped macassar ebony French Art Déco daybed holds its own with the Rodin, simultaneously communing with the cagelike cast-

iron devices that once admitted fans to a Manchester soccer stadium. The turnstiles' fashionably flaking painted surfaces are a foil for a sun-bleached whale vertebra—yet another sculptural contrast, deftly executed by Mother Nature.

Guests often gravitate to the Danish leather armchair by Fritz Henningsen—a striking form "that looks like a bird about to take off," says

Marzo—perhaps taking note of the cast-iron English cobbler's bench or the mammoth tusk mounted on a bronze base (she coveted a tusk; Marzo just happened to have one).

In the entrance hall, sinuous consoles that might be mistaken for contemporary sculpture were crafted from industrial-laundry-machine parts spelunked by Marzo in a Chicago salvage yard. Beneath

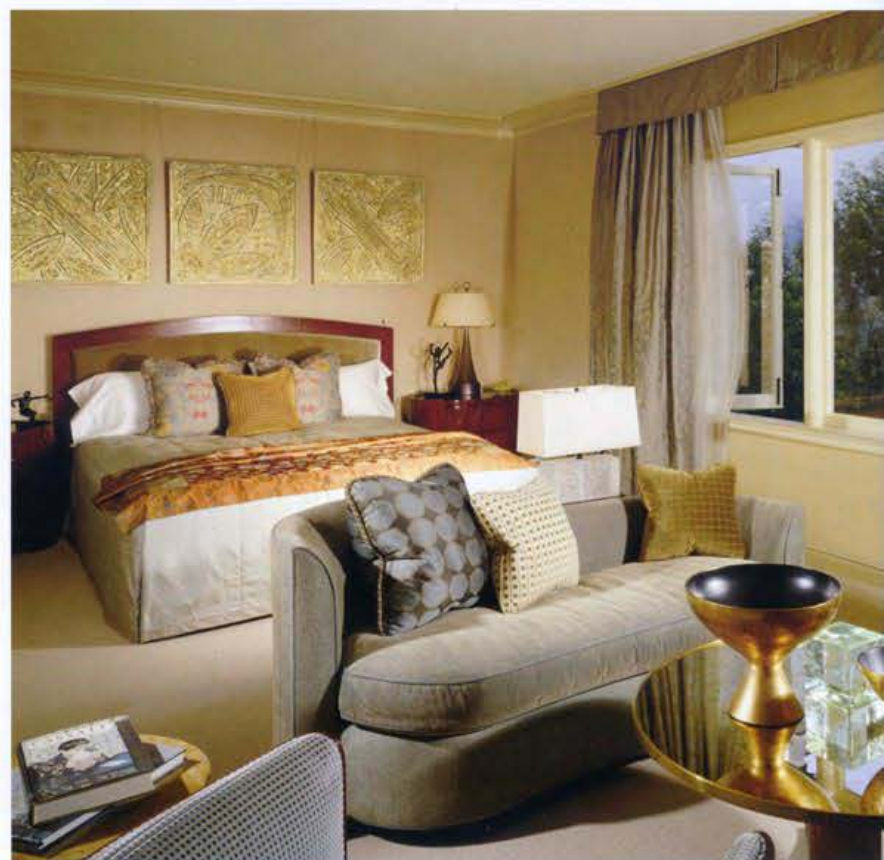
the Toulouse-Lautrec posters in the dining room is a console he designed that is made from miscellaneous factory discards and then topped with black granite. "Finding new life for industrial objects is sort of the ultimate green solution," says the designer, who has been collecting them for more than a decade. "I think it's the new frontier of antiques."

As finely tailored as a bespoke suit, the residence is an exhilarating high-wire act of design. A clue to its adventuresome spirit begins at the entrance, where a pair of beveled mirrors hanging opposite one another capture images of small Rodin sculptures, "creating the impression of little Rodins dancing in infinite reflections," Marzo observes.

The designer enveloped the living room walls in champagne silk velvet. "When you are into heavy metal, you have to play it off with something soft and glamorous," says the client. "The wallcovering had to be luxurious but at the same time not fight with the art."

In the library, walls the color of burnt cinnabar were drawn from the Monet self-portrait, the room's warmth enhanced further by serious bookcases loaded with art books ("I like to be surrounded by readable books, not decorative ones," she says). The red-lacquered table in the dining room brings out Toulouse-Lautrec's crimson and provides "a nice glow," especially when candles in the Déco sconces and the Murano glass candelabra flicker in the evening.

The dramatic tuxedo effect of the breakfast room—black walls with cream collars—is offset by the collection of Clarice Cliff pottery, a rebellious nod to



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the client's English childhood, when Cliff's flamboyant works, now the stuff of frenzied bidding, were considered déclassé. "It jollies up the room, makes it feel less formal," she notes.

Marzo frequently buys furniture at auction, supplementing prime antiques with custom pieces of his own design—among them, a spool-like sha-

green-and-bronze table in the library that accompanies a pair of Arbus chairs. The simpatico relationship between designer and client was illustrated when they wound up absentee-bidding against each other over a textile at an auction (Marzo was victorious, much to her bemused annoyance).

The residence's quirky blend

of "the beaten up and the velvet, the comfortable and the hard-edged," continues to engage the occupant.

The only drawback to James Marzo's distinctive design is that entertaining is sometimes challenging. "It can be difficult to get a conversation going when people's eyeballs are everywhere," she says—admirably. □

ABOVE: "The kitchen hadn't been done in 40 years," says Marzo. "It was very nondescript." He expanded and remodeled it in a classic, modern style to fit the rest of the house. OPPOSITE: The designer gave the breakfast room "a twist" by painting the walls black and the trim cream. A Murano glass chandelier hangs over a circa 1940 French parchment dining table, and a colorful collection of Clarice Cliff pottery, circa 1920–40, lends vibrance to the room. The molding is original.

OPPOSITE: In the master bedroom's sitting area, gold footed bowls by Sascha Brastoff join works by Rodin and Chagall. ABOVE: Plaster Art Déco panels add a subtle texture, while dancing Rodin figures "give the room some movement," Marzo points out. Bedcovering fabric, Jim Thompson. Brunschwig & Fils settee fabric. Textured silk wallcovering, Scalamantré. Of the design concept, he says that combining Modern art and found pieces can be hard, "but when it works, it really works."

