



Instant Attraction

This glamorous penthouse overlooking San Francisco Bay features a tasteful mix of art and custom pieces within its modern interior *By Chelsia Tan. Photography Aaron Leitz*

When American interior designer Alison Pickart chanced upon a remarkable moonstone-and-gold firescreen in an auction catalogue, she never thought this serendipitous find would guide her artistic direction for a particularly memorable project—one that involved refurbishing a 1930s penthouse apartment located in San Francisco’s Pacific Heights neighbourhood.

Its owners had envisioned a warm and inviting space that would highlight their contemporary art collection and also frame the surrounding views of the bay. This would entail a reconfiguration of the apartment’s original layout, which comprised a constrictive number of smaller rooms with heavy architectural millwork and small doorways.

They engaged the services of architecture firm Sutro Architects, which led to a collaborative partnership between the interior designer and architects Stephen Sutro and Karen Moy. Together, they had to decide on an overarching concept that would suit a space for socialising and entertaining, as well as one befitting of the owners’ reputation as



art lovers who are passionately involved in the city’s arts and cultural scene.

“Stephen was very interested in how light was cast in the apartment as well as how the rooms were defined. The architect worked out the schematic design of the space so that the entire front of the unit could be opened up,” says Pickart. “Because the clients were used to more traditional spaces, we offered a design we considered to be warm and modern. Using a mix of subtle metallic tones, wood and a neutral palette that was heavy on texture and yet not too severe, we were able to create this soft answer to the crisp, modern lines that were architecturally necessary.”

MOVABLE SPACES

The team rerouted the unit’s utility network to open up the front half of the apartment into an airy, light-filled space for entertaining, as well as ensure unblocked views of the city from the living room. This allowed space for the couple’s modern art collection, an important factor that influenced the look of their home.

Pickart’s discovery of the firescreen—designed by Paris-based artist and designer Christophe Côme—was an unexpected game changer that shifted part of the focus from the art. According to her, the clients fell instantly in love with it, and this revelation sparked a search for furniture with truly unique design elements.

Left to right: The curved forms of the console, mirror and decorative pieces reflect the architectural elements of this alcove; the moonstone-and-gold firescreen is an ornamental highlight in the living room; metallic details on the armchairs and coffee table bring an extra layer of shine to the living area; the chevron tiles create visual interest in the minimalist bathroom vertical fumed wood panels throughout the kitchen and living area add warmth to the space

Previous spread: A custom Aquitaine chandelier by Coup Studio hangs overhead in the open-plan living and dining room





“This was really the piece that drove the direction for the furnishings throughout the home. It was clear that every piece of furniture that would be selected for this space would need to have an elevated form—everything was to be unique and bespoke and, essentially, a piece of art,” she says.

From cream Koumac armchairs with sleek brass bases by French architect and designer Thierry Lemaire to a custom cocktail table by Damian Jones that features polished brass slats, such details were tastefully added to magnify the overall visual impact without overwhelming the eye.

Instead of drawing attention away from the owners’ art collection—an expressive curation of paintings by American artists Gregory Kondos and Doug Schneider, as well as Spanish painter Manel Anoro—the furnishings offered a soothing backdrop to these vivid works. The varying elements in the living room are anchored by a goatskin parchment and brass sideboard from Scala Luxury between the living and dining areas.



SOCIAL PLANS

This open-plan concept includes the living area as well as the culinary zone. A stylish space for dining revolves around a regal Bangle table from Hudson Furniture. Above the table is a bespoke Coup Studio glass crystal chandelier, which reflects light streaming in from a large window overlooking the bay.

In the kitchen, the eye is drawn to an island with a marble countertop, paired with leather stools by American designer Kelly Wearstler. The room exudes the same welcoming atmosphere, as vertical blonde wood panels installed throughout the apartment adds warmth to the overall palette of cream and bronze.

More statement furniture graces the lounge room. Here, a pair of dusty pink lounge chairs, a velvet-and-linen sofa from Dmitriy & Co, and an alpaca shag rug form a homely retreat. Together with a leather-wrapped writing desk from Joseph Jeup and a murphy bed hidden in a wall panel, the lounge also doubles as a guest bedroom.

This page:
The soft leather on the Blaire writing desk from Joseph Jeup and a Chiffchaff Chair from Gregorius Pineo imbue this space with a sense of cosiness; Laurel chairs in dusty pink by Kelly Wearstler and flame-stitch velvet-and-linen sofa from Dmitriy & Co add colour and texture to the lounge area

Opposite page, clockwise from top
The kitchen features an island with a Calacatta marble countertop, flanked by cream and bronze Elliott counter stools by Kelly Wearstler; the dining area features the Bangle table from Hudson Furniture, which has a walnut top with a live edge; in this breakfast nook, a John Liston chandelier floats above a Hélène Aumont table and a custom banquette

This page: The master bathroom opens into the walk-in wardrobe, which features a vintage chandelier, custom millwork and a bespoke piece that integrates a bench and island counter; in the master bathroom, a geometric-patterned tile backsplash draws the eye while sconces from Urban Electric and Waterworks faucets add shine

Opposite page: In the master bedroom, lounge chairs sit opposite a Dmitriy & Co bed upholstered in alpaca cashmere; brass pendant lamps from Apparatus Studio hang from the ceiling next to the bed



Similarly, the master bedroom is a picture of calm and relaxation. Soft cream and pink tones are punctuated by brass pendant lamps on both sides of the bed, while Paul Balmer landscape paintings bring a sense of vibrancy via orange and green tones.

The project was smoothly completed in 18 months, much to the delight of the owners. “The clients were really hands-on during the design and selection phase, but once it came to the execution, they just backed away and let us do our thing,” recalls Pickart. “They checked in at the midway point and were surprised at how smoothly everything was going.”

She adds: “It was incredible working with Karen Moy, the studio leader and project architect at Sutro. There were so many parts of the design that required infinitesimally accurate detailing and attention. She also grasped the importance of the furniture layout and the architectural elements required to make the whole plan work.”

The modern lines of the interior are softened by a subtle mix of metallic tones, wood and a textured, neutral palette