

MAKING MEMORIES

For a Stinson Beach vacation home, a design team draws on a family's most-loved recollections.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE FLETCHER



For many families, there's a vacation spot that lives happily in collective memory—an annual retreat where many milestones and fleeting moments occur, from the youngest members learning to swim to epic,

all-ages games of Capture the Flag. For this San Francisco-based clan of six, that place has always been Stinson Beach. “We have been going there since the kids were babies,” shares the wife about their favorite destination. “We have many photos of them on the beach at different phases of their lives.” After years of renting a summer house in the small Marin County town, when the wife came across a large, for-sale lot with views of Mount Tamalpais and the Bolinas Lagoon, it felt like it was time to build the permanent family retreat of their dreams.

Initially, the couple envisioned creating an East Coast, Shingle-style cottage. But after hiring the late architect Lewis Butler and associate principal architect Federico Engel, along with designer Monica Cardanini, a new idea evolved. Together the team shaped plans for a modern home that's seamlessly integrated into the landscape. “We wanted to develop it organically through the context of the site,” explains Engel. “So it became a streamlined beach house related to its Northern California location, with an open concept and simple, durable materials that could tolerate the rugged coastal climate and heavy use from four kids.”

The idea of blurring the line between interior and exterior is at the heart of the new home. You can see it in the expansive, window-lined great room that spills effortlessly onto the courtyard overlooking the water, thanks to floor-to-ceiling glass doors. Flooring choices reinforce the connection between indoors and out, as the polished concrete of the great room melds easily into the locally sourced bluestone pavers on the patio and the steps down to the water. “The color of the concrete and the stone blend beautifully together, as well as with the sand on the dunes,” notes Engel. “It makes for an easy transition.”

With the idea of constant movement between interior and exterior spaces, Cardanini set about creating multifunctional, easy-going rooms. Furnishings with low profiles and muted hues blend with the landscape. Flexible pieces accommodate guests and activities, from the custom dining table that expands to 20 feet, to the family room's sectional with movable backrests that allow it to be configured in multiple ways. Private spaces are designed as more intimate retreats, such as the smaller-scale bedrooms that rely on tactile surfaces to create a feeling of cozy repose. The main bedroom “needed to be neutral, but warm,” says Cardanini. Using textural elements like the grass-cloth wallcovering and a tufted Moroccan area rug, the designer layered in earthy brown and terra-cotta shades.

Between the public and private realms lies the breezeway entrance. “This forms the center of the house,” notes Engel. “All the circulation goes through here.” Flanked by two sliding barn doors at either end and topped by panels of Western Red Cedar and skylights above, the area aims to create an immersive natural experience. This liminal role evolved later on when the family began occupying the home. “During a massive rainstorm, everyone found themselves drawn to the breezeway where you could smell and hear the rain, yet be sheltered,” recalls the wife. This caused them to rethink the passageway as a multipurpose area where they could spend time together, complete with cozy seating and a Ping-Pong table. “It's become this organic space to use when the weather isn't great and on foggy days,” says Cardanini.

Good or bad weather, the home represents a place of refuge. “It's a touchstone, a place where they can perennially bring the family together,” observes Engel. This role became particularly poignant this past year following the pandemic when, as the family sheltered in place at their new abode, they added their first significant milestones there. “Our eldest two had remote graduations at the house,” says the wife. Unexpectedly united again in a location that meant so much to them, the experience has made this vacation retreat feel more like a family home. ■



For a Stinson Beach vacation home, designer Monica Cardanini and architects Lewis Butler and Federico Engel imagined a space celebrating the beautiful environs—even in transitional areas like the hallway, which serves as an extension of the exterior with bluestone floors, cedar ceilings and large sliding doors. Two paintings by artist Charley Brown provide a beautiful counterpoint. Hodges pendants by Arteriors glow overhead.

Functionality and simplicity define the main seating area in the great room, anchored by a vintage Moroccan rug and a generous B&B Italia sectional beloved by the family and guests alike. "It invites casualness," notes the wife. "It can fit all of us comfortably, and people can even lie down on it because it's so wide and accommodating."





Above: A rainstorm that forced the family inside one weekend prompted them to reconsider the cedar-lined breezeway entrance as a permanent gathering spot, now made cozy with a B&B Italia Fat-Sofa with matching ottomans and a RS Barcelona Ping-Pong table. A resin-and-wood artwork by Matthew Scheatzle plays up the warmth of the wood panels.

Opposite: Towering ceilings in the kitchen required creative custom cabinetry, so Cardanini turned to Zachary Lindsey to create cabinets with tall doors. For the island, a rippled surface in a light-oak finish adds interest. Counter seating is a series of Slope bar stools by West Elm, and the trio of Folk pendants are by Rejuvenation. The painting is by Edwige Fouvry.



Left: To pair with the rich tones of the main bedroom, the main bathroom is a composed palette of earthy materials, featuring custom cabinetry by Zachary Lindsey in a Shinnoki desert oak finish, Perla Venata quartzite countertops, and Robert Kuo Chinois field tiles by Ann Sacks on the walls.

Opposite: Responding to the cedar beams on the ceiling above, Cardanini wanted to envelop the main bedroom in complementary warm tones, incorporating Phillip Jeffries Driftwood grass cloth on the walls, a vintage Moroccan rug, a B&B Italia Husk bed with creamy upholstery, and a B&B Italia bronze-and-leather chaise lounge.

