

2006 San Francisco Decorator Showcase The Backstory in Twenty Questions

1. What attracted you to this venture?

We had several things going for us—the home was in a premier San Francisco residential neighborhood, it had good bones, and our architect was able to quickly articulate what had to be done—bring drama to the stairhall, enhance the flow of the house, and convert unused space into architecture that enables and enhances a modern lifestyle—wine cellar, media, and separate living quarters for extended family or guests.

Additionally, University High School wanted to lease it for their 2006 Decorator Showcase—the premier design showcase on the West Coast and a really good cause.

2. That sounds great. What didn't you have?

What we didn't have was time—we had to deliver the property to the designers on a set date to meet their installation requirements. One hundred and thirty five days. No ifs, ands, excuses or whining.

3. How did this challenge come to be?

Richard and Barbara owned the home that was the Coyote Point showcase home in Atherton in 2005. They gained insights about what makes a great Showcase house and wanted to repeat the process.

They bought 3701 Washington in San Francisco in the fall of 2005 and recruited University High School to stage their 2006 San Francisco Decorator Showcase here. They understood the potential, invested heavily in the transformation, and faced significant risk. They are currently listing the home for sale with Olivia Decker with a listing price of \$15.5 million.

4. Tell us about the architecture of the home.

The home has an impeccable architectural pedigree. The architects were John Bakewell and Ernest Weihe. Bakewell was a graduate of the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris. He, together with Arthur Brown, were the architects of the new City Hall after the 1906 earthquake.

5. What opportunities or constraints did this present to you?

The constraint was that the exterior needed to be kept intact. Windows, doors, exterior finishes were what they were.

The opportunity was to reinterpret the interior of this French Renaissance Revival building into a home for a modern family, with a short stint as the 2006 San Francisco Decorator Showcase.

Playing off the classic exterior architecture created the opportunity to do some great things on the interior of the home.

6. Where did you start?

We started by extending the main stair to the top floor of the home, allowing ample daylight into the center of the house.

The top floor was transformed from “back of house” space to lifestyle space to take advantage of the light and great views from the Golden Gate to Aquatic Park.

We moved the garage from the back of the property (in an old carriage house), to underground. We excavated over 300 tons of rock to make space for the new garage.

We connected this new underground garage to the house via a gallery and made the ground floor much more functional.

The old carriage house was converted into a guest suite and sitting room.

The kitchen and family room were completely redone to enhance flow, usability and the requirements of a modern family.

The master bath was completely redone with Lefroy Brooks fittings and mother of pearl onyx stone.

7. How did the site figure in?

The outside was completely recast to allow indoor/outdoor living with terraces, gardens, outdoor rooms and a place to catch the sun or read a book.

One of the challenges was that the rock was so close to the surface here. Again, we had to excavate more rock.

Stephen Suzman really understands San Francisco gardens and outdoor rooms, and masterfully played off the home’s exterior architecture in creating these rooms.

8. How much did all this cost?

I am not at liberty to say, but what I can tell you is the rule was roughly \$1.75 of value for \$1.00 of cost.

Did I mention all the rock we had to excavate?

9. In One Hundred and Thirty Five Days?

Nothing like a deadline to focus your attention.

10. What was the most pleasant surprise in the course of building this out?

Actually, there were two.

The designers who are showcasing their work in this home were really appreciative of what we accomplished. The feedback was ample, enthusiastically positive, and a great surprise.

And the ground floor spaces turned out amazingly—all a credit to the vision of the designers. Upstairs/Downstairs was transformed into all Upstairs.

Tim Ritter got the wine cellar to speak volumes about the art of wine appreciation, and the crafts center and laundry areas are great spaces to hang out—kudos to Nan Rosenblatt and her Academy of Art crew.

11. What was the most unpleasant surprise?

Our general contractor had a garage sub that did not understand the time constraints we were operating under. This lack of comprehension of what we needed to do was a shocking surprise. To get to an on-time, on-budget completion, everyone had to drink the koolaid.

That subcontractor left and Stroub Construction recruited a new sub, Derry Casey Construction, that delivered an on-time, on-budget performance.

12. Who was the Most Valuable Person on the Showcase project?

Now that's a tough question! It truly is a team effort, but if I had to pick one person, it would be the general contractor's onsite superintendent. Jay was the first stop on whether we were getting good quality, and kept up the daily pace of the job. Honest, forthright, and experienced.

13. Do you have a favorite room in the house?

I am still awestruck by how quickly the 28 different designers took their respective spaces and transformed them. Leaves one numb...

To answer the question, I don't have a favorite room, what I have is an appreciation how, with a well trained eye, almost anything is possible. And how my straight eye could not do it. Humbling.

14. Anything else about this project that leaves you feeling humbled?

The University High School Showcase team, led by Delanie Borden, were true professionals. The logistics involved in selecting twenty eight designers from a field of over four hundred, demarcating interior spaces, promoting this event as the West Coast's must see event, overseeing interior design installation in a three week window, and then opening your doors to 20,000 people is simply awe inspiring to watch.

Makes an aircraft controller's job at SFO look easy.

15. What role did the general contractor play in this story?

A critical role. They were the ones that deliver the quality.

Quality you can see, touch and feel.

A great general contractor will bring both exacting supervision and good trade contractor bench strength to the team. Steve Stroub's organization provided both—on time and on budget.

16. How did architecture play a role in this story?

The architect needs to understand what an Owner wants, what the structure is, and how to articulate the final product to the contractor.

It is very much in the “voice” of the architect. Dan Phipps' office has a voice that articulates a very clean and elegant solution to the challenge of producing an architecture of contemporary classicism.

17. How did this “voice” respond to the constraints of keeping the exterior intact?

They did a masterful job of reinterpreting the Bakewell French Renaissance Revival style on the inside for a modern audience. They extended the detail of the balustrade in the stair hall to the extension to the third floor. They articulated a voice that both received the traditions of the past and the needs of a twenty first century San Francisco family.

You can hear this voice in many places—the stair hall, the family room, kitchen, and the top floor.

18. I understand what a contractor does, and what an architect does. What do you do?

As experienced developers and owners—over \$160 million in the last ten years—Antaeus Properties ties all the moving parts together—acquisition, design, approvals, construction, interiors, move-in—everything—to understand how close—or far—we are from an on-time, on-budget finish.

Owners have to view it this way or you get bound up in mistakes, delays and costs that you had no idea you were exposed to. On endeavors of a certain scale, this exposure can be measured in millions of dollars. We tie it all together, mitigate the exposure, and get it done.

We act for Owners who need this, but recognize that they don't have the time to climb up the learning curve.

We have a tough time showing off what we do. Until it makes the pages of Architectural Digest or the architect's monograph, what we have created are very exceptional homes for very private people.

The Showcase was a great opportunity to show what we do—get to an on-time, on budget result of a very distinctive home. And work with a very talented group of designers along the way.

19. What would you do differently next time?

There are a number of elements I would do differently. I will be happy to show you each of them at the opening of our next Showcase!

20. What is your next challenge?

Finding the perfect project.

When what you do is finding faster/better/smarter ways of turning \$1.00 of cost into \$1.75 or more of perceived value, you don't know where the opportunity will be.

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