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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2006

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RUSTIC SONOMA

WALKER WARNER ARCHITECTS AND TEDRICK & BENNETT CREATE
A COMFORTABLY ELEGANT FARMHOUSE IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN/TEXT BY NINA BAKER



Inspired by California ranch structures, Brooks Walker of Walker Warner Architects imagined a modern farmhouse set in a Sonoma Valley landscape lined with vineyards and dotted with oak trees. "It's a family retreat that's about how the rooms relate to the environment," says the architect.



above: "The interiors are both formal and casual," explains designer Michael Tedrick of Tedrick & Bennett. Walnut flooring and sconces by Christian Lialgre for the Holly Hunt Collection add warmth to painted Douglas fir siding in the bedroom-wing hallway. opposite: Salt Creek Seeps 9, 2003, by Johnnie Winona Ross, anchors the living room, where a Tedrick-designed low table is set on a handloomed Elizabeth Eakins wool rug. The custom sofa, covered with sued leather, is from Belmar Company. A 1971 untitled painting by Gary Edward Blum hangs above the hand-carved bluestone fire surround. A soaring ceiling features wood trusses with exposed chrome fasteners.



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To the naked eye, Northern California's wine country could easily pass for Tuscany. Rolling hills covered in vineyards and oak trees seem to go on forever, and the business of the day always involves eating and drinking ridiculously well. One San Francisco couple, however, had no illusions about where they were when they decided to build a house in Sonoma Valley.

"We wanted the place to look indigenous to the area," says the husband. The wife, a fourth-generation San Franciscan, had a generous parcel that was originally purchased by her great-grandfather as a working dairy farm. When they thought it was time to look for a weekend and summer retreat to enjoy with their three children, the Sonoma plot was the obvious choice. "We liked the idea of keeping this land in our family for several more generations," says the husband.

They turned to San Francisco firm Walker Warner Architects to create a modern interpretation of classic ranch structures. Principal architect Brooks Walker and project manager Michael McCabe took their cues from such forms as water towers, barns, hop kilns and poultry sheds to configure a board-and-batten courtyard house that's as much a tribute to local ranch life as it is a showplace for an impressive collection of art and furnishings.

"Early California architects like William Wurster had a wonderful understanding of the landscape," says Walker. "A two-story New England clapboard structure, for example, wouldn't have worked here. A single-story farmhouse that wraps around a courtyard makes much more sense because it easily integrates into the terrain while offering protection from the strong summer winds. We took agrarian architecture and rendered it contemporary."

For the interiors, the couple hired San Francisco designer Michael Tedrick, of Tedrick & Bennett, who brought to the table an eye for tailored rooms that are distilled just enough to remain comfortable and fuss-free. "I wanted to introduce things that would have lasting value and look well with a lot of patina," explains Tedrick. "The house has all the rustic qualities of a ranch, but it's organized with formal nuances—ample hallways, butler pantries and wide-open spaces in which to gather and entertain. The clients can have processional moments of entry into a room when they're giving a party, but when they're with family and close friends, this house is a very easy place to be."

Walker and Tedrick created a materials palette that would stay true to the California ranch vernacular and at the same time provide something newer and more malleable. "You see raw boards on classic barns all over the state, but those would have been too brown," says Walker. "We didn't want this thing to look old. We went with cedar siding painted linen white and, for the roof, zinc with a standing seam." Inside, the architects

opted for painted Douglas fir boards throughout, some placed vertically. The ceiling boards, also Douglas fir, are simply resawn and bleached, and the floors are textured walnut.

By designing classic, comfortable furniture and choosing soft-handed fabrics such as cotton, suede, washed linen and jute, Tedrick managed to draw attention to the house's loftiness without losing a sense of intimacy. The designer covered the flooring in the entry hall with a bound seagrass rug from Stark. He placed an elegant walnut settee covered in Rogers & Goffigon fabric near a lime-and-maple-wood sculpture by David Nash. A handmade lichen-colored wool rug from Elizabeth Eakins sets the tone in the living room, where gourd- and ginger-jar lamps from Christopher Spitzmuller sit among slipcovered furniture and paintings by Johnnie Winona Ross, Squeak Carnwath and Gary Edward Blum.

Directly across the courtyard from the kitchen and dining room is the private wing of the house, on one end of which is the master bedroom. Surrounded on three sides by generous windows, the space is flooded with light. Absorbing it like a sponge are a heathered-white sheared-wool rug from Stark and apple-green washed-linen slipcovers. Perhaps Tedrick's one obvious nod to sophisticated country living is the quilted chintz he used as drapery fabric. But step into the master bath, and you're reminded of how sleek this house can be: smooth bluestone surfaces, Dombracht fixtures, slate floors, and sinks by Philippe Starck for Duravit.

"It's not complicated," insists Tedrick. "There are no extraneous elements. At its core, this house is a wonderful place of shelter. Something rather ambiguous about the boundaries allows you to move in and out easily."

In fact, when the couple expressed the need for a separate dining room, Walker persuaded them otherwise. "Our clients initially had much more traditional programmatic requirements," he says. "The living room made sense as a gathering place, but a formal dining room in a vacation house? The kitchen is the place where people hang out, so we made that the center instead." Tedrick outfitted the kitchen with woven-rush bar stools, handmade walnut-and-maple baskets from Nantucket and bronze pendants from the Holly Hunt Collection. A counter is all that divides the kitchen from a casual dining area, which opens seamlessly onto the breakfast porch.

"Once we really thought about the site and how the clients' lives fit in, there was a logic that unfolded," says Walker. "We didn't have to try too hard. You simply solve the issues of sun and wind and light, and the building kind of designs itself." +

opposite: A blackened-steel chandelier from Sloan Miyasato hangs above a DessinFournir walnut table and side chairs from Rose Tarlow-Melrose House in the dining area, which opens to a breakfast porch.





"THE HOUSE HAS ALL THE RUSTIC QUALITIES OF A RANCH."

above: A collection of serving containers from Sue Fisher King rests on shelving in a sitting nook near the dining area. A custom coaching table designed by Tedrick offsets a selection of light-colored textiles, including Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric on a banquette cushion and pillows and draperies made with Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric and Scalomandré trim. opposite: Bronze pendants from the Holly Hunt Collection, Guy Chaddock barstools with woven rush seats, and handmade Nantucket basketry provide texture in the kitchen. The double oven is from Thermador, the refrigerator is by GE Monogram.





"A wraparound porch extends from the bedroom wing past the living room and kitchen to the outdoor dining area," explains Walker. Lush plantings and furniture from Munde Skiles adorn the expansive courtyard. "You have to let a house breathe and be organic," says Tedrick.

**“WHEN THEY’RE WITH FAMILY
AND CLOSE FRIENDS, THIS HOUSE
IS A VERY EASY PLACE TO BE.”**



above: Tedrick juxtaposed slate flooring and a bluestone counter and tub deck with a teak backsplash in the master bath. Dornbracht fixtures are paired with Philippe Starck-designed Duravit sinks. top right: The bed in the master suite is dressed with Carleton V silk; the Roman shades are made with Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric. right: A large, gnarly oak tree protects the master suite's exterior. opposite: Carpet from Stark, draperies made with Rose Tarlow-Melrose House and Rogers & Goffigon fabrics, and armchairs with Rogers & Goffigon slipcovers maintain a soft palette in the light-filled sitting area of the master suite.

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