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A YOUNG FAMILY **BRINGS VIGOR** TO A STATELY SAN FRANCISCO EDWARDIAN



WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY SABINE ROTHMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WERNER STRAUSS





Harry Morfit peeks from behind one of the pink velvet chairs that liven up the living room. Finely detailed curtains provide an extra level of polish.

Preceding pages: A Meghan Gerety drawing and printed pillows add punch to traditional decor.

Right: An antique Turkish Oushak rug in the entry ties together hues from adjoining rooms and grounds the tufted sociable.

Bottom right: Slipper chairs and a tray table make a pretty spot for a nip.

Far right: The Morfits — Anna and Mason with Harry and Bea.



it's bath time at the Morfit house. But 2-year-old Bea and Harry, 4, have escaped—for the moment. Half-clothed, they're engaged in a game of follow-the-leader—going round and round on the tufted velvet sociable that anchors the entrance hall of the San Francisco Edwardian they share with their parents, Anna and Mason Morfit, and Teddy, their baby brother. Their high jinks take the stately piece of furniture down a notch. Because that's how it goes in this family home. Within a classic framework, everything's fun and games. At least until their parents swoop up the laughing children to face the music.

Bold color, cheerful patterns, and inventive details infuse this house with youthful vitality. "Everything was purposefully designed to suit our lifestyle, which is not always tidy," Anna says. "The house is elegant but not precious."

Within the tree-lined streets of their Presidio Heights neighborhood, it's rare to find a home that hasn't been renovated within an inch of its life. But Anna and Mason *wanted* something in disrepair—a project they could make their own.

"This house, built in 1900, was the dog of the neighborhood," says Robert Stiles, the project architect. "Even though someone lived there, it looked totally abandoned." Anna recalls trees growing in the kitchen and pigeons nesting in the roof.

Anna brought in interior designer Melissa Warner of the firm Massucco Warner Miller, a triumvirate with offices in San Francisco, L.A., and Seattle. Warner had helped Anna and Mason before, so she understood their vision—and shared it. "Everyone wanted the best for Anna and Mason," she says, "and it shows."

While keeping the footprint intact, the team reconfigured the interior, creating rooms with elegant proportions appropriate to the house's scale and reinventing long-gone architectural details. They opened up the rear half of the main floor to create a casual space that includes a kitchen, breakfast nook, and cozy sitting area. Plus, they installed new windows and re-clad the exterior. Amazingly, it's so much in keeping with the neighborhood that it looks as though they did nothing at all.





For a formal room, this doesn't take itself **too** seriously.

—DESIGNER MELISSA WARNER

In the dining room, daring orange, drawn from the hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper, and the high-gloss gray moldings and taffeta curtains that temper the vivid emerald silk background showcase the flair for color demonstrated by designer Melissa Warner (top right).



Anna was on site almost every day, answering questions. “We didn’t want to get held up for 12 weeks at a time waiting for a specific tile,” she explains. Her decisiveness helped move the project along quickly. And as an avid reader of design books and magazines, she always had a few visual references to help explain what she was after. “I’m a little spoiled,” Stiles says. “She’s very good at communicating what she wants.”

And what is that? “I started out wanting everything,” Anna laughs. “But we scaled back—eventually.” High ceilings on the main floor give way to lower ones upstairs. Correspondingly, crown moldings and baseboards get smaller and less elaborate, as would have been the case when the house was built.

Warner’s lighting, hardware, and fabric choices are not quite as fancy elsewhere as on the main floor. Cabinet- and curtainmakers with more basic skills—and lower fees—were assigned to less complicated tasks. This is not to say the Morfitts didn’t splurge or that the project wasn’t ambitious, only that quality was maintained while keeping the budget in check. For instance, the couple decided to forgo the luxury of central air, an eco-sound decision many residents make in San Francisco, where summers are mild.

Painting the entry and hallways a continuous tone was also a way to contain costs. More important, the neutral core allowed the team to indulge in the saturated palettes that bring this house to life. Creating restrained transitions meant they could go for intense color in individual rooms.

“Anna has great style, and she’s not afraid to commit to bold color,” Warner says. “The overall aesthetic is traditional, but that doesn’t have to mean formal if you use a youthful palette.” The pair already had a vivid base in place for the living room. Anna still loved her fuchsia velvet armchairs and chocolate sofa. But she was ready for a more sophisticated backdrop than the bright yellow painted walls they used last time. Choosing a rich yellow-orange for the walls felt more grown-up—but still spirited—as did long caramel silk curtains.

They proceeded through the house methodically—room by room. The process, while efficient, contained a healthy dose of

Architect Robert Stiles had steel beams installed to create this open area that includes Anna's dream kitchen and a breakfast banquette (bottom right), as well as bookshelves with a built-in desk and a sitting area (not shown). Its airy atmosphere contrasts with the saturated palette in the rest of the house. Family-friendly materials include faux-ostrich vinyl on the banquette and a custom-laminated linen seat on the rattan chair. Nicholas Coley's school-bus oil painting appeals to kids and grown-ups alike, thanks to subject and technique.







playfulness. Anna usually had one element her heart was set on. And her designer would build around it. “Melissa would drop packages in my mailbox with schemes for each room,” Anna says. “I really looked forward to getting those goodie bags.”

For the dining room, an emerald green wall covering from de Gournay held Anna in thrall. Its mouthwatering hues gave Warner license to make unpredictable choices, such as tangerine velvet on the vintage chairs.

Painting the moldings high-gloss gray—anything but neutral—grounds the room with refinement, repeated in gun-metal taffeta curtains and a leather-clad door studded with nails. The space glows with invitation and personality. “A formal dining room might be intimidating, but this one doesn’t take itself too seriously,” Warner explains. “The orange really helps.”

The saturated color up front is balanced in the back half of the house with a light and airy space devoted to practical matters. “I love things to look nice, but with the family, we need function,” Anna says. “Otherwise, you just can’t be comfortable.” While she does find velvet upholstery and Oriental rugs surprisingly durable, the kitchen and casual living area are heavy duty. The day the family moved in there was a big spill. (“Big!” recalls Anna.) Fortunately, the banquette’s faux-ostrich textured vinyl wiped clean like a dream. And above the banquette hangs a new piece by a young artist Warner found on the street. “Oil paintings are surprisingly resistant to sticky fingers,” she laughs. “Much better for a kitchen than works on paper!”

Bea and Harry’s bedrooms are equally inviting—and adorable. “They’re such little people, they don’t need that much space,” says Anna. Bea’s built-in bed and shelves are shipshape. The turquoise, white, and watermelon scheme suits her now, but can grow with her. Navy-and-white stripes plus pumpkin-colored headboards give Harry’s room its boyish punch.

The master suite is on the same floor, but feels like a world away. Here, the wallpaper’s golden floral pattern sparkles like a new romance. Warner decided to marry its warmth with coral and cream for a scheme that’s feminine but not girlish. And the






Thoughtful details make the master suite special. "It's my sanctuary," Anna says. The bedroom's palette—gold, coral, and creamy white—creates a warm glow that is echoed in the sitting area (top left), which has a different balance of the same hues, featuring more neutrals. Its tone-on-tone wallpaper complements the floral pattern.

Left: Anna's dressing room offers the soft geometry of custom fretwork on pocket doors, a wallpapered ceiling, and a Soumak carpet.

Opposite, top: Wallpaper with leaping zebras and shimmering golden accents, mirror, textures, and lighting—jazz up the powder room.



It couldn't get much cuter—but Bea's room is also designed for efficiency, with a built-in bed and shelves. Turquoise walls will be easy to change if she ever wants to, but she'll be keeping the custom-made pillows, which sport appliques of her silhouette. **Right:** Strong color reigns in Harry's room, where twin orange headboards measure up to horizontal stripes. **Bottom right:** An attic office with flair—thanks to fretwork fabric shades and the dormer's architecture. **Far right:** The house, restored and updated, with solar panels.





BALANCING ACT

Melissa Warner's fearless strokes don't just reflect the audacity of youth. They're tempered with techniques that give her work its grounded sense of flair.

- No need to pitch all your furniture and start from scratch. If the quality's good, give selected pieces a face-lift with vivid new fabrics—the fountain of youth.
- Typically, Warner upholsters larger pieces of furniture, like sofas, in neutral basics—then she pops the color in accent chairs, wallpaper, and pillows. “If you start with a crazy couch,” the designer asks, “where do you go from there?”
- When you're using strong color in a series of rooms, keep the connecting common space a clean neutral tone. Warner used the same shade of vanilla in different sheens for the walls, ceiling, and crown molding in all the hallways.
- “People ask me if you need to maintain the same palette throughout a whole house. I don't think so, if the depth of color you're using remains consistent.” She suggests matching your brights to the tone that's third down on a paint chip.



designer complemented the wallpaper her client loved so much with two subtle tone-on-tone prints—an abstract wave-like pattern on the walls of the sitting area and a damask on the dressing room ceiling that echoes the fretwork on sliding pocket doors. That kind of attention to detail helps a project sing—and inspires client-designer rhapsodies of praise. “Melissa always adds an extra level of refinement and sophistication,” says Anna. In turn, Warner maintains she's never had a client who loved to talk about trim so much. “Her interest allowed us to have fun with the details that give this house its special flair.”

To top off the project—literally—Anna and Mason placed solar panels on their roof. (They do live in San Francisco, where composting is mandated by law.) Although the initial investment was hefty, the city, state, and energy company all offered tax credits and refunds. Not only have their energy bills dropped dramatically, but the Morfitts are contributing to their children's future in a meaningful way. And isn't that what a family home is supposed to do? ■

Architects: Robert Stiles and Charlie Barnett **Interior designer:** Melissa Warner

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