



# *tailored* traditional

Award-winning designer Gina Viscusi Elson adds sophistication and understated elegance to a neglected home.

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Once upon a time, high in the hills off a winding private road sat a sorely neglected home. The architecture was incomplete and confused. A slightly traditional exterior gave way to a contemporary and decidedly unfinished interior. But all was not lost—the home featured a one crowning glory—a most marvelous view of the entire Santa Clara Valley. “It’s like hovering in the clouds,” notes Gina Viscusi Elson, the interior designer who transformed the interiors of this home into an elegant European jewel touched with California casualness. Her clients, an executive and his wife from the East Coast, moved to Northern California when he was hired to work at a Silicon Valley company. “My clients had only a few treasured pieces they wanted to move to the new home,” says Viscusi Elson. “So we were able to start from scratch.”

But first they had to strip most of the home’s interior architecture and bring it down to the studs. “The house did have a decent floorplan. The flow from room to room was good and the structure had a perfect orientation to the property,” recalls Viscusi Elson. “The foyer, dining room, breakfast nook, family room, and living room all open to a gracious European-style stone terrace. But the home’s architecture lacked consistency and the finishes and materials just didn’t make any sense, thus the home struggled to have an identity.” Architect Noel Cross worked with Viscusi Elson to add architectural interest both inside and out. “The original architecture was a European hybrid,” she says, “so Noel recommended that we complete the look by adding arched windows, copper drains, a custom front, and garage doors. I selected European-style lanterns as a finishing touch.”

Since the walls were bare, it was the perfect opportunity to turn the home into a smart house where computers, telephone, security, and music are controlled from a laptop, functionality being extremely important for the executive homeowner. The previous contractor left off finishing details, so the team added moldings around windows, crown molding in every room, columns to the entryway, beams, coffered ceilings, and more substantial baseboards throughout—nothing overly dramatic, but just enough for the European casual elegance the homeowners were seeking.

**OPENING PAGE** The exterior of this home was missing important architectural details. Gina Viscusi Elson, ASID, Allied, CKD, Noel Cross, AIA, and Conrado Home Builders, turned it into an elegant European hybrid with arched windows, a French slate roof, copper drains, and stone façade detailing.

**LEFT** The staircase railing changed from white tube ship railing to a custom forged-iron railing more appropriate to the architecture. The floor is “Noche” travertine in a Versailles pattern, and the custom lighting fixture is the room’s jewel. The family piano fits in the large open entryway and a painting by the homeowner’s mother hangs overhead. These are two of the special pieces the couple brought with them from the East Coast.

**RIGHT** The living room is first and foremost a comfortable space. The homeowner likes to read and there is a place for her books, a cushy sofa to curl up on, and an oversized mantle to frame the blazing fire. The rug is from Medallion Rugs, which provided all of the home’s area rugs. The telescope has a special engraved thank you to the homeowners, a gift from the entire team—Viscusi Elson Interior Design, Noel F. Cross Architect, and Conrado Home Builders.



Viscusi Elson chose colors from a soft, organic palette, per the preference of the homeowners, which also serves to complement the remarkable view. When it comes to furnishings, she mixed antiques, antique reproductions, and contemporary pieces with elegant lines. The resulting rooms are brimming with warmth and personality. Her custom lighting is always a highlight on every project, and for this home she designed pared-down traditional fixtures with a subtle European flair. Each fixture is the sculptural focal point in the room—a lovely visual presence whether illuminated or not.

The property also boasts a pool house with an exercise gym, a home theater, a guest bedroom, a bath, and a kitchen. The gardens are terraced and included a small vineyard. Viscusi Elson made certain that the landscape include several outdoor seating areas. “For chilly evenings, I wanted to build a fire pit,” recalls Viscusi Elson. “But the team was not buying into the idea, so I organized a group trip to the Inn at Spanish Bay where we had drinks around the hotel’s fire pit, and everyone agreed it was a must-have!”

Viscusi Elson has the uncanny ability to see a space completed in her mind from the very beginning. “A project of this scope is a journey. It is crucial that I listen to my clients’ desires and understand how they want to experience and live in their homes. I suggest added luxuries and designs that will enhance the overall feel. I work with them to create a truly unique environment that is beautifully and solely theirs.” Such is the story of this remarkable makeover.

The homeowners’ dining room table and hutch fit the scale of the room so Viscusi Elson recovered the chairs, adding two different fabrics for an eclectic feel, a Tabriz area rug, a custom chandelier by Murray’s Ironworks, and artfully styled draperies. She introduced the homeowners to Ira Yeagar’s work and they loved his original oils, particularly his peasant series. “They connected to his work because the images remind them of their humble beginnings.” One of Yeagar’s studies hangs in the dining room with a small collection of Yeagar’s peasants in the entryway.





**TOP** "My goal was to create pockets of intimate areas in the master bedroom," says Gina Viscusi Elson. "This is one of the best bedrooms I have ever designed." There is a nook that holds a chaise that's the perfect spot for reading a book and enjoying the view. A custom reproduction of an antique bookcase was specified to fit perfectly in the corner with beautiful hand-colored prints of European castles above. The bed was custom designed to fit the scale of the room and to complement the added wainscoting. Cross paneled the pre-existing ceiling with a wide plank paneled ceiling painted to match the wainscoting.

**BOTTOM LEFT** "Everywhere else we created custom pieces, but in this guest room we purchased the bed and chairs from a popular furniture company," says Viscusi Elson. "Since this room gets less use, we could save some budget knowing the pieces would not get too much wear-and-tear. I recovered the chairs in a striped fabric so they appear to have a custom look." The homeowner had a precious heirloom trunk passed down from generations. Viscusi Elson had it professionally restored and it is the room's most treasured piece.

**BOTTOM RIGHT** Architect Noel Cross added the beams and corbels, a nice cottage touch. The room features a custom built "old" desk with high-tech features. The walnut floors—which are throughout the home—were bleached first, then hand hewn, with pigment added back at the end for a softer look. Antique botanicals hang above the credenza.



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