

Let There Be Light

A Carefully-Preserved Victorian Facade Hides A Sunny, Skylight-Studded Contemporary Home

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NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER—or a house by its facade. This classic San Franciscan Victorian proves that point precisely: Behind its circa 1900s exterior lies a contemporary stunner with nary an ornate crown molding in sight. It's an end-to-end rethink of an original home that had “lots of character, but not a lot of space or light,” builder Christopher Gate recalls. “This was an ambitious and complex ground-up renovation that dramatically transformed it.” And it's full of surprises. Multiple skylights span the structure, shiplap and circular windows reference the homeowner's Nantucket roots and fold in unexpected nautical hints, even a few traditional elements are snuck in among the sleek contemporary interiors designed by Ric Pulley. The result is a striking light-drenched residence with a style that, refreshingly, doesn't check just one box.

That idea is driven by architect Joram S. Altman's design. For instance, the main floor's contemporary open layout includes a parlor—an essential space for any high-class Victorian-era home—but it doesn't have doors. The parlor, living room and library have traditional coffered ceilings, but sans ornamentation and painted a stark white, they feel modern and geometric. And



unadorned windows, skylights that floods the rooms with light and clean-lined furnishings throughout further banish any associations with 19th-century stuffiness.

The living room's white paneled accent wall is another traditional moment. And shiplap, a rustic-leaning finish that might have appeared in an old Victorian homes only in private areas, is spot-lighted there and in the kitchen and dining areas. “These were all ways we paid homage to the history of the house and to a different period without being too literal,” Pulley. “We wanted a quiet nod to traditional

design with an emphasis on a contemporary aesthetic.”

Light plays a starring role in the home's transformation. A chief complaint of the owners, a family of four who'd lived in the previously-existing house for close to a decade, was the lack of it. So now, skylights are tucked in wherever possible. “It's become a very well-lit house despite the fact that there are no windows on either side—only at the front and back,” says Gate. The game-changer is an enormous four-paneled skylight letting sun shine from the top level down a central staircase

to a new subterranean library excavated two floors below.

Throughout the five-year build, Pulley concentrated on unifying the home with a cohesive design. A black and white scheme with warm woods anchors the palette, and mid-century modern furnishings (rather than expected antiques) mix with more contemporary pieces. The liberal use of white enhances the light and emphasizes the architecture, and material repetitions convey harmony. “We aimed for a level of classic permanence, a look that's stylish but not too current or trendy,” he says.

◀ Sunlight is ushered into the open dining area's rear addition via a glass-paneled ceiling and glass doors. In an unusual twist, the transparent ceiling doubles as a glass-bottomed balcony off the primary bedroom—a unique feature that builder Christopher Gate says the homeowners absolutely love. The glass walls are angled around the property's 110-year old canary palm tree.

▶ Glass follows the roofline of the primary suite's shower. The size of the primary bedroom and bath were both enlarged during the renovation, with cathedral ceilings enhancing a feeling of spacious-ness.



▲ Appliances are neatly hidden behind smooth white panels in the open kitchen, while the floating ceiling defines the space and acts as a surround for a series of lights. Interior designer Ric Pulley extended the shiplap across a powder room door for a seamless look.

Renovation

▼ Pulley chose mid-century modern and contemporary pieces for the room; the black steel shelves to the right extend into the home's parlor. The living room's coffered ceilings were an exercise in precision: Gate's team used the main floor's joists to form the gridlines.

The staircase is another striking piece of architecture with floating treads and glass railings chosen to allow the passage of light. It's further illuminated by a one-of-a-kind glass chandelier dreamed up by the homeowner, a work of art that dangles nearly two stories. Gate and his team custom fabricated it, sourcing the glass and parts from Italy, hiding the wiring and delicately suspending it from the skylight's crossbars. "It's a dramatic piece of lighting, and everything needed to be

meticulously aligned in order for it to hang perfectly," says Gate. "There was absolutely no margin for error."

A dominant useage of white extends outside, where glossy paint softens all the Victorian accents of the original facade—which was carefully preserved the home was built around it. Now, the exterior itself is a slightly contemporary spin on the city's beloved "painted ladies" style, cleverly providing just the tiniest clue as to what awaits inside. **CH**



A luxurious tub hugs one end of the primary suite's bathroom. ▶ Light pours down the central three-story staircase from a gigantic skylight. ▼ White paint gives the original Victorian facade a more contemporary look. ▲ The front door's vibrant red hue references the wife's Hong Kong upbringing.

