

# San Francisco Chronicle Magazine

MAY 8, 2005



**Summer  
Home Design**





BY ZAHID SARDAR

# A Clutch of Things

Personal mementos fill an interior designer's home



Facing page: A walk-through closet with refinished maple floors separates the living room from the bedroom. Claire Kahn's cut-paper sculpture hovers above an acid-green Fortuny headboard. Above: A black-and-white painting by Jennifer Morla hangs above a custom upholstered sofa with colorful Donghia pillows.

Moving to a Russian Hill home was a watershed moment in interior designer Holly Hulburd's life. Many parts of her varied life in San Francisco settled into a cohesive whole there, and she reconnected with people she had known in the design world two decades earlier.

"I was trained as an architect," says Hulburd, whose firm works on interior architecture as well as interior design for Fortune 500 companies and venture capitalists. But her duplex 1980s condominium, in a narrow three-story building designed by new-urbanist architect Daniel Solomon, is the antithesis of the costly modern interiors she creates. Solomon's structures are always object lessons in the economy of space and, even in 2003, Hulburd's 1,100-square-foot home was affordable.

Hulburd liked the relatively small price tag on the condo, and the intimacy of the space she would share with her dog, August. But

there were other attractions. Hulburd and Solomon have been friends since 1979, before he designed the building, and she also knew designer Jeffrey Weisman and his partner, interior designer Charles Pfister. They were former owners, who moved in right after food critic Patricia Unterman had left.

"I had spent a lot of time there with them all," says Hulburd, who met Pfister when she was a fabric and carpet designer. "It was lined with Fortuny fabric and had Knoll sofas and sisal everywhere," she says. Twenty years later, without upholstered walls or the designer look she knew, she barely recognized it.

But still in place was a cut-paper sculpture by Claire Kahn inset into a window in the bedroom. Hulburd had known Kahn (whose father is the head of the design department at Stanford) ever since the two met at Pfister's, and her artwork essentially clinched the sale.

"As I headed back downstairs I knew I had to live here," says Hulburd. Although the floor plan was unusual, "I hardly changed

The living room seems larger with a landing that connects it to a deck with Golden Gate Bridge views. Demi-walls form railings for stairs down to the kitchen, dining and guest rooms. The Parisian coffee table from Ecart is paired with Le Corbusier armchairs and an Alvar Aalto bentwood armchair upholstered in a Clarence house fabric designed by Walter Gropius. The Shaker spindle-back "mama" bench is an heirloom from Hulburd's mother. For new looks, Hulburd rearranges found objects and seashells amid her collection of artwork by friends or well known artists like Ellsworth Kelly and Richard Serra. Facing page: blown glassware, an Aalto vase and Ittala votives from Bloomers.







In the salon, a B & B sofa bed contrasts with antique architectural prints, Michael Kenna photographs and images of Nantucket, where Hulburd vacations. Aalto and Eames tables complement an Artemide floor lamp. Facing page, top: a sky-lit stairwell connects both floors to the street. Bottom, a chest and dining chairs are heirlooms. Seen through wall openings is a painting by Deborah Oropallo. Flowers are from Bloomers.







anything — just the lighting and hardware, and I added a zillion new bookshelves. Even my old furniture fit perfectly," she says. Heirloom antiques, modern classic: and a lifetime's collection of prints, paintings, ceramics and glassware fill the very personalized space. "They bring a smile to my face," she says.

"Many of my friendships and collaborations have occurred around this place. It used to be my San Francisco salon," she says, and it has become that again because old friends now reappear like birds returning to a telephone line.

"Claire Kahn and her husband, Dan Tuttle, came over, as did all the others who used to visit Jeffrey and Charlie," she says.

There's only one hitch: Hulburd wanted to be near Crissy Field. "But at least I can see it and the Golden Gate Bridge from my deck upstairs," she says. ♦

*Zabid Sardar is The Chronicle design editor. E-mail him at [zsardar@sfnchronicle.com](mailto:zsardar@sfnchronicle.com).*

