



NATURAL

Interior Designer Linda Bradshaw Allen's own St. Helena rustic modern home reflects the unique connection between nature and artful living in Napa Valley.

ARCHITECTURE BY HOWARD J. BACKEN, FAIA,
OF BACKEN GILLAM ARCHITECTS

STORY BY STEFANIE LINGLE BEASLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSE MANUEL ALORDA





Linda Bradshaw Allen is a true creative. Her storied career has taken her from interior design to fashion and back again, crafting spectacular private residences in Northern California and recently on the East Coast for Beyoncé and Jay Z. “After over 20 years of working with clients in many areas and styles of homes,” relates Allen. “I have learned to prioritize their hopes, dreams, and real-life needs to create interiors which are each unique and special. This time I looked at the unique priorities that were key to me and my husband.” The pair loves the simple rusticity of a cabin in pristine woods, as well as the design purity and practicality of the best modern architecture. For their new St. Helena home, Allen notes, “We wanted a home filled with materials derived from nature, not from chemicals, and we wanted a haven from the outside world.”

Allen (who has her own firm and also works in concert on special projects with Amy Weaver through Weaver-Allen) knew exactly whom she wanted to bring her new home to life. “I’ve been a long admirer of Howard Backen’s work,” she says. “He’s a legend; I never thought he might consider a tiny project like this but I had to ask. He said, ‘I love tiny cottages!’ And so we began.”

Backen created a great room with 11-foot ceilings as the spine of the home. The space includes living, dining, and kitchen areas—all of which look through massive glass sliding doors out to a series of outdoor rooms including a seating area with fire cauldron, covered dining pavilion, a hot tub. Allen’s favorite outdoor room is the tented “Casbah” featuring an antique Balinese daybed from Summerhouse. “For at least seven months of the year,” she says, “those ‘Backen’ doors, as we like to call them, open up the entire great room to the garden.”

Indeed, the seamless indoor/outdoor design makes the home an entertaining dream.

“In the late summer friends come for a buffet and barbecue,” says the designer. “We clip fresh herbs from the patch by the kitchen door and combine them with our Meyer lemons to season grilled salmon. I love to decorate with flowers from the gar-









den and foraged foliage for a loose natural look, inspired by my friend Sarah Lonsdale."

Inside, Allen placed a firm emphasis on clean, honest materials. "As much as possible I wanted to use natural products free from chemicals," she explains. She sourced wood for the floors and beams from a barn in the Midwest. "I love the imperfections, the knots and holes add a rusticity, and they are developing a wonderful patina with time." To balance the rusticity of the wood Allen selected crisp furnishings with sleek, modern lines. The sofa, (upholstered in a cotton blend from Glant) faces a pair of swivel chairs by Lee upholstered in un-dyed hair-on-hide and a burlwood table with steel legs from de Sousa Hughes. Pillows throughout the room are baby Alpaca from Sandra Jordan. The hearth is clad in dramatic black wrought iron.

The custom bar stools, benches, and dining table were made to Allen's specifications in New England by Black Creek Mercantile. The generous dining table (that seats eight) is surrounded by Gemla chairs hand-crafted in Sweden with woven leather seats and backs. "They are changing over time, too, like the straps on a Louis Vuitton bag," says Allen.

A sumptuous bed clad in an emerald-colored French cotton velvet dominates the master bedroom. "The coverlets and pillows are all natural linen from Coyuchi," notes the designer.

Allen's passion for travel and fascination with global spiritual traditions is evident in an intriguing collection of art, accessories, and antiques, including two Jasper Johns signed prints, an antique Balinese dancer's hand on the console table behind the sofa in the living room, a 17th-century fragment of a hand-carved angel's wing purchased in Paris, which sits atop an 18th century English gateleg table in the dining nook, and vintage sunburst mirrors in the master bedroom. She points out, "I think the works give deep personal meaning to our home."

Allen is clearly in love with this home—with good reason. "People are captivated by the house—they seem to connect with the natural materials," she relates. "It's not pretentious, but it has a luxurious magic." Will this serial home renovator call this her forever home? "I love it but I don't know," she admits. "Once you get design in your blood it's hard to resist a good project." ♦