

# Flying High

A hilltop aerie in Healdsburg captures the experience of soaring over the picturesque Russian River Valley.

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**Architecture:** Jeff Zimmerman, Zimmerman + Associates, Inc. **Interior Design:** Penny Shawback, Damon Savoia and Julie Savoia, Shawback Design  
**Home Builder:** Andy Briglio, Black Oak Builders, Inc. **Landscape Architecture:** Cary Bush, Merge Studio



At the main entry, a wall clad with a natural limestone veneer and a Western red cedar soffit flow seamlessly into the home's interior. The white-oak-and-stainless-steel door by the Pivot Door Company sits flush with the concrete foyer floor.

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he Russian River Valley has a way of evoking strong feelings: in the enveloping morning fog; an ethereal sense of solitude; in the golden-hour shade of a great black oak, a deep feeling of calm; and from a windswept knoll overlooking

the valley floor, the sensation of flying.

The latter was architect Jeff Zimmerman's experience when he first visited this sloping site along a bucolic wine country corridor that follows the contours of Dry Creek Valley and the Russian River. "The site gave us an instant sense of soaring and movement," recalls the architect, who was brought to the property by New York-based clients planning to make it their full-time residence.

Determined to capture that experience in a work of architecture, Zimmerman created a low-slung structure with what he calls a "Prairie-style modern" emphasis on horizontal lines that march across the knoll, terminating with a cantilevered primary bedroom suite that floats over the hillside. Rather than concealing those lines with ornamental plantings, landscape architect Cary Bush emphasized them with textural grasses and simple, low-growing ground covers. "We wanted the architecture to float all on its own and to let the landscape design ground and accentuate the home's foundation," Bush explains.

Vertical cedar louvers on a number of windows shield the interiors from the sun, providing both privacy and filtered views of the picturesque surroundings. Broad glass pocket doors afford panoramic vistas of the vineyards, rolling hills and mountains while connecting the living spaces to a pool deck that extends out to the hillside. From there, a water feature steps down through the terraced courtyard before arriving at a grotto shaded by the dwelling's cantilevered bedroom wing.

One might expect elements such as steel and board-formed concrete to be visually heavy, but, as the architect notes, they are lightened because they "frame beautiful materials," including limestone and Western red cedar that flow from exterior to interior. The result is a feeling of weightlessness. In some places, those muscular

structural components hint at the engineering required to pull off the complex design. "When you create a big overhang that juts out 16 feet, it's quite the challenge," general contractor Andy Briglio says. Other feats of construction include the kitchen island, which is anchored to the foundation to support a cantilevered countertop so long, a structural engineer had to be consulted.

To balance such strong horizontal forms, an interior design team comprising Penny Shawback, her son Damon Savoia and his wife, Julie Savoia, took opportunities to introduce soft curves: rounded swivel chairs in the living room; a sculptural floor lamp featuring three glowing rings in the dining area; and a round concrete sink perched atop the powder room's floating vanity. By selecting furnishings with an artisanal quality—from custom creations to modern pieces by European manufacturers the homeowners favored—the designers ensured that their often-daring choices will stand the test of time. The kitchen's architectural stools, for example, were crafted using traditional wood- and metalworking techniques. The colorful reclaimed-wood dining table—which is lacquered to a high gloss—was a collaboration between Dutch designer Piet Hein Eek and the Shawback Design team, who "hand-selected each board to create the right combination of blues, reds and whites," Damon notes.

Throughout the house, similar pops of color enliven the architectural palette of steel, stone and cedar, from vibrant rugs to showstopping wallcoverings behind every bed. "For the primary bedroom, we sourced a very graphic wallpaper in purple, cream and blue, and the homeowners loved it," Julie says. "We knew then that they were going to be open to all sorts of adventurous elements." Like a curved living room sofa—"and not just a curved sofa, but a *bright blue* curved sofa," she emphasizes.

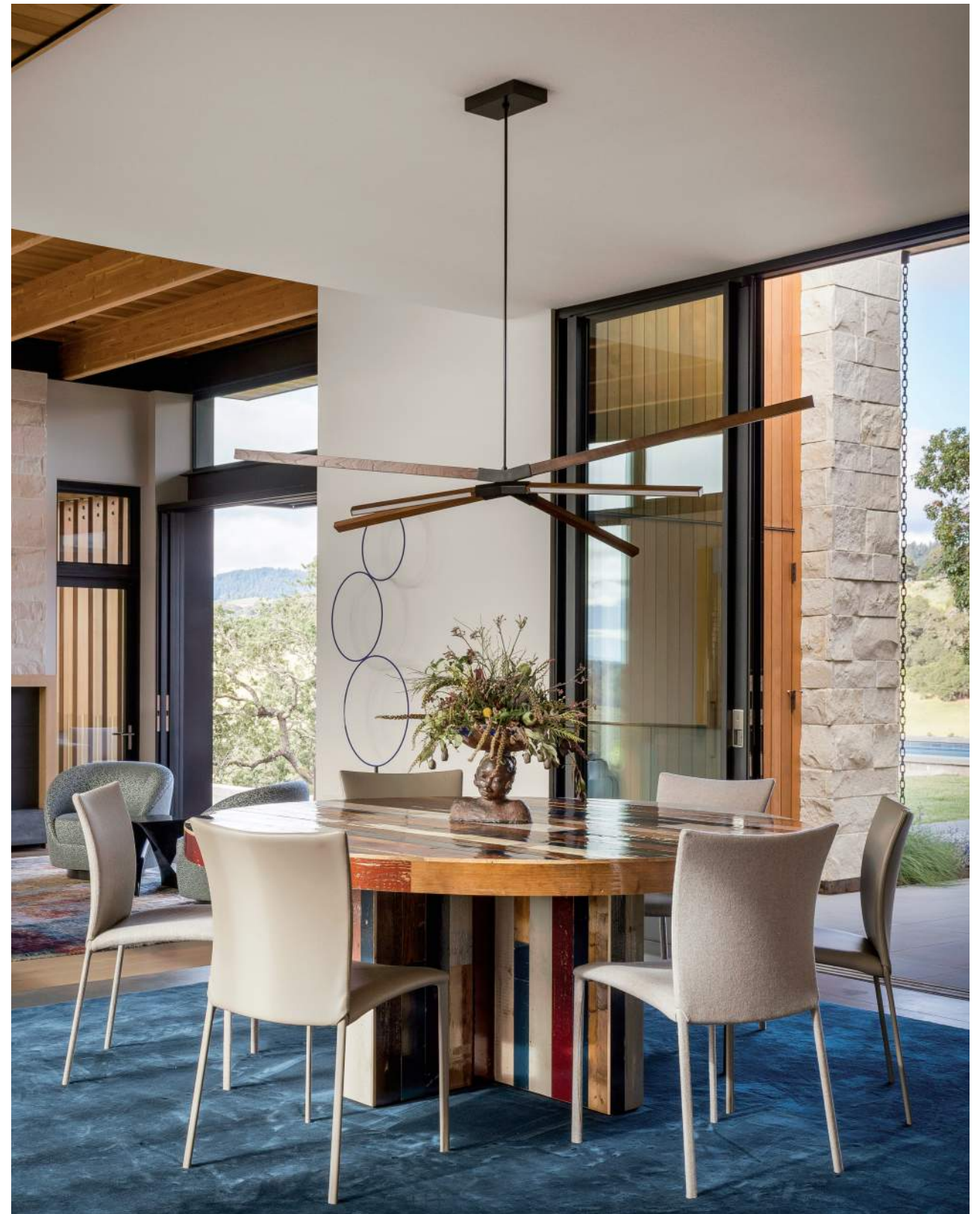
"Our inspiration for all the colors was the setting on the top of the hill," Shawback says. "It's always surrounded by the sky, looking out over vineyards and pastures and ever-changing seasons." And with a view that dynamic, design decisions are just a matter of choosing how to let the valley set the mood. ■

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In the living room, an Arflex sofa curves around an Egg Collective coffee table, taking advantage of the sweeping views. Sitting between the two A. Rudin swivel chairs is a stool by Elan Atelier.

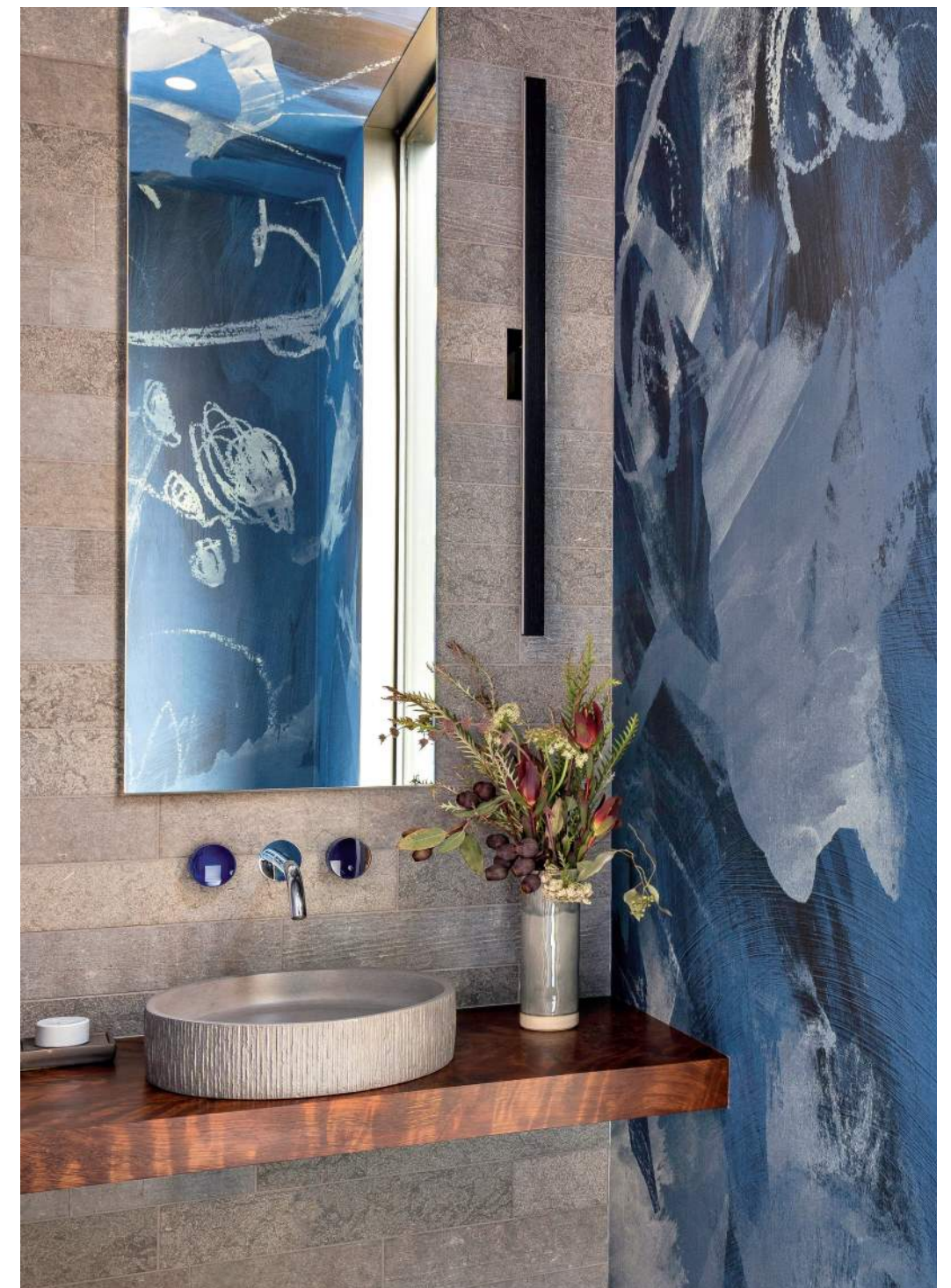


**Above:** The designers selected each piece of reclaimed wood used in the Piet Hein Eek-crafted table. Surrounding it are Draenert dining chairs; three are upholstered in leather and three in Kvadrat wool. The rug is by Holly Hunt; above is a Stickbulb fixture.

**Opposite:** Tufenkian's Jackson Firewood rug inspired the living room's color palette. For the wall above the staircase, the homeowners commissioned St. Helena-based painter Gregory Lang to create *Manhattan Sky*, a diptych that nods to their residence in New York City.

The kitchen island's Armony cabinets feature a cantilevered Neolith countertop and Dornbracht faucets; overhead is a Bocci light fixture. Glass multislide pocket doors by Fleetwood Windows & Doors seamlessly connect the kitchen and courtyard.





**Above:** Calico's abstract Lark wallcovering adds a painterly quality to the powder room. A curly redwood slab countertop supports a Clodagh-designed vessel sink by Trueform Concrete. The linear wood-and-metal sconce is by Stickbulb.

**Left:** The primary suite's Flexform bed is surrounded by glass walls on three sides. Maxalto's Febo armchair provides sleek seating inside the room while Gloster's Dansk lounge chair faces the view outside. The custom drapery is by Sonoma County Shade Company.



One of the property's old black oaks shades the Pennsylvania bluestone courtyard and Heath Ceramics tile-clad pool. A row of Gloster's Grid loungers aligns with a custom Cor-Ten steel planter filled with penstemon, yucca and muhly grass.

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