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HOME+DESIGN

LIVING WITH ART

THE COLLECTORS EDITION

An enormous photograph
is the focal point in
a family room by
Barbara Scavullo,
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A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

San Francisco architect Jennifer Weiss turned a 1960s apartment into an airy space illuminated by park views and a remarkable art collection.

BY JULIE CARLSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA PLAGEMAN



Enrique Martínez Celaya's painting, *Sea and Snow*, sets a tranquil tone in a seating area with a textural coffee table and a hand-blown glass lamp (detail opposite).



Weiss found the vintage Florence Knoll bench, which runs the length of the living area, at San Francisco's Hedge Gallery. Covered in green leather, it highlights the verdant views and Squeak Carnwath's *Sox and Balls*.



Architect Jennifer Weiss grew up surrounded by art. Her grandmother founded the now-closed Dorothy Weiss Gallery in San Francisco. Her mother, Gretchen, was a docent at the Oakland Museum and later joined her husband, John Berggruen, as a director at his eponymous gallery in Union Square ("I have fond memories of hanging out at the museum and later at the gallery as a child," Weiss says). At Columbia University, Weiss majored in architecture and art history, spending her junior year in Paris before earning a masters degree in architecture from Harvard. "I grew up in an atmosphere of art, but only recently have I begun to understand how much it influenced me," she says.

Not surprisingly, designing spaces that are specifically well suited to the display of art is second nature for Weiss. Take the San Francisco apartment that she recently renovated for a real estate investor. The once dim and dreary space now functions as a sleek backdrop for an impressive art collection, curated by Weiss, that includes works by prominent artists—such as Martin Puryear, Nathan Oliveira and Squeak Carnwath—as well as emerging talents.



When her client first showed her the space, “I couldn’t hide my disappointment,” Weiss says. Located in a nondescript 1960s building, the 2,000-square-foot, second-floor condominium “had a dark warren of rooms off a long hallway, and the windows were ratty aluminum sliders.” Despite the fact that the apartment faces Alta Plaza Park, only the front room provided a glimpse of the leafy views. While Weiss came up with a strategic plan for the renovation, her client lived in the apartment with only a bed, a table and a chair.

“I wanted to create a sense of discovery, to create spaces that unfolded organically,” Weiss says, describing the key moves she used to transform the look and feel of the apartment. First, she raised the height of all doorways and windows to eight feet in order to create a sense of loftiness. Then she removed a third of the hallway, which was long, narrow and claustrophobic, and many of the walls that blocked the view of the park. The open space at the front of the apartment offered room for a new foyer, where a canted bench conceals storage for A/V equipment under its seat. At the opposite end of the hallway, removing walls allowed for a large master shower.

In an effort to open up the formerly dark apartment, Weiss created a pass-through from the living area into the kitchen, where Absolute Black granite and vertical-grain white oak complement the modern palette.

By reconfiguring the space, Weiss also opened up the views to the park, which can now be glimpsed from each part of the open-plan living area that comprises the kitchen, living and dining area, media room and office. New Douglas fir windows and doors pivot open, like an accordion, to the deck outside. The window frames and doors were ebonyized to resemble wenge wood, and the walnut floors were stained a dark, rich espresso. For the walls, Weiss tested 10 different paint colors before settling on a uniform shade of “art gallery white,” a custom blend of Benjamin Moore Decorator’s White and Linen White that she describes as “a modern shade that is not too cold but also not too yellow.”

The apartment now offers multiple opportunities for displaying art. Although some works come from the family firm (Weiss’ father’s John Berggruen Gallery), Weiss also sourced pieces from Sightline, a Washington, DC-based art consultancy, and from art fairs such as the Armory Show in New York and Art Basel Miami Beach, both of which she visits annually. “Art fairs are the best way to get a snapshot of what’s happening in the contemporary and modern art world,” she says.



LEFT: The view from the kitchen to the living area highlights the library nook, graced by a Martin Puryear etching. BELOW: The media room is delineated by a wall with a built-in bench to hide A/V equipment.



RIGHT AND BELOW: Weiss added critically needed square footage to the master bath. The color of the shower tiles is echoed in the Robert Motherwell lithograph (pictured at left) and an etching by Brice Marden.



In the living area, above a B & B Italia sofa, Weiss hung a large painting by Enrique Martínez Celaya, which she says is “powerful and poetic, and a good counterpoint to the calmness and simplicity of the architecture.” In a carefully designed composition of lines, forms and textures, a small bronze sculpture by Judith Shea sits above the polished Venetian plaster fireplace surround. “The glossy white plaster contrasts with the rough finish of the L-shaped slate bench, which wraps around to create a small reading nook,” Weiss says. “The bronze piece worked well with this palette of materials, and is also innately appropriate near a fire.” Opposite the fireplace, the grass-green tones of Squeak Carnwath’s *Sox and Balls* painting are picked up by a vintage Florence Knoll bench from San Francisco’s Hedge Gallery, covered in Hermès green leather.

In the reading nook, Weiss situated a classic, black-leather Eames lounge chair—“a piece that has always evoked reading for me,” she says—adjacent to open shelving. The smaller scale and subtle texture of a Martin Puryear etching hanging above the

The media room opens up via accordion glass doors to one of the apartment’s two courtyards—this one leads to the owner’s office. *Curvature*, an oil painting by local artist Michael Gregory, hangs over the sofa.

shelves underscores that this is a quiet place.

Other notable pieces in the apartment include a Robert Motherwell lithograph and a Brice Marden etching in the master bath, a John Baldessari screen-print of an orange guitar in the hallway (“It’s a graphic, masculine piece,” Weiss says), a Michael Gregory landscape painting in the media room and a Nathan Oliveira figurative painting in the guest

bath. Notes Weiss, “Figurative works are always great in the more private spaces of a home, and oil paintings are one of the few media that can withstand a moist environment.”

During the renovation, Weiss’ client became so enamored of the design process that he involved himself in every detail, from the size of the bathroom tiles to the length of the cabinet pulls in the kitchen to the intricacies of the hidden door hinges. Although he had been interested in art before, he now is a dedicated gallery visitor and emerging collector. As Weiss says—and she is well-qualified to weigh in on the subject—“Once you have lived with art, it becomes a lifelong passion.” ■