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REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

Taking Design Inspiration from Bay Area Midcentury Modern

Design-showroom curator David Alhadeff decodes the appeal of a San Francisco Bay Area midcentury modern home

By **JULIE BAUMGARDNER**

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SINCE HE FIRST OPENED his design showroom, the Future Perfect, in Brooklyn, David Alhadeff has been shaping contemporary design as both a retailer and a talent scout. On day one, in 2003, Mr. Alhadeff signed on lighting designer Lindsey Adelman and her now-ubiquitous twiglike chandeliers. In the intervening years, he's shown a knack for making astute discoveries: Piet Hein Eek's imperfect scrap-wood pieces, Lee Broom's marble-tube lights and Calico Wallpaper's digitally printed wares, to name a few. Not bad for a Seattle kid who expressed his passion for interiors by creating makeshift shoebox homes for his Smurfs.

Now 41, Mr. Alhadeff has moved the store to Manhattan and opened a San Francisco branch. The latter decision was influenced by friend and designer Charles de Lisle, whose own home—a pristinely preserved 1947 Don Emmons house in Marin County's Mill Valley—whetted Mr. Alhadeff's curiosity about the area.

“Midcentury Bay Area architecture kind of stems from Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons,” explained Mr. Alhadeff of the San Francisco architecture firm in which Mr. Emmons was



HAIL, CEDAR | Residents have adapted the woody, 1947 home but honored the aesthetic of its San Francisco architect, Don Emmons. PHOTO: LESLIE WILLIAMSON

a partner. The group was celebrated for creating affordable, nature-inflected, understated homes that minimized nonessential space—much like Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian houses. “Here’s an underknown snippet of history,” added Mr. Alhadeff.

The two-story, 1,250-square-foot cedar abode boasts an open plan and a sleeping loft, its large public space divided into vignettes. “Charles and [his partner] Ralph [Dennis] have done a great job of bringing together eclectic objects,” said Mr. Alhadeff. “This magnificent single-room space, with dramatically high ceilings, is like living in a cabin, but it’s their main residence.”

“Decorating is becoming less fussy and more natural,” said Mr. Alhadeff. “The only classic midcentury modern piece in this classic midcentury home is an Eero Saarinen table.” The homeowners irreverently pair the iconic “tulip table” with an 18th-century Georgian settee. Any small, ornamented couch will do. *Vintage Velvet Studed Settee, \$1,575, chairish.com; Saarinen Table by Knoll, from \$1,935, paletteandparlor.com*

Pay No Heed to Periods



Vintage Velvet Studded Settee and Saarinen Table by Knoll PHOTO: CHAIRISH; KNOLL, INC (TABLE)

Mr. Alhadeff likes introducing plants that match those outside and placing them by windows to blur inside and out. “Big, chunky midcentury ceramic planters by the likes of Stan

Conform With Nature



1960s Stan Bitters Thumb Pot from Just In Modern PHOTO: 1STDIBS

Bitters, JB Blunk and Heath would work well here. Very Northern California.” 1960s Stan Bitters Thumb Pot from Just In Modern, \$1,800, 1stdibs.com

“You need grounding pieces like the settee and dining table, but movable furniture makes a space adaptable,” said Mr. Alhadeff. He finds light, easily repositioned wicker and rattan interesting. “Rattan can feel midcentury, but its Victorian aesthetic gives it even more appeal.” Split the

chronological difference with an early 20th-century-inspired version. *Nigel Coates Lehnstuhl Chair by Wiener GTV Design, \$4,446, DZINEELEMENTS, INC., 203-855-9325*

“Timber brings comfort and warmth, and these days, sustainable foresting makes the carbon footprint for such materials much smaller,” said Mr. Alhadeff. He gets his paneling from Restoration Timber, in Sausalito, Calif. (restorationtimber.com), but recommends this tromp l’oeil wallpaper, too. “It’s cost effective and maintains the

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Nigel Coates Lehnstuhl Chair by Wiener GTV Design

Plank on It



Piet Hein Eek PHE-13 Wallpaper by NLXL PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

lambertetfils.com

Consider Humble Concrete

“The floor is integral-colored saddle-brown concrete, which was used in many of the

illusion until you touch it.”

Piet Hein Eek PHE-13

Wallpaper by NLXL, \$299 per roll, nlxl.com

“The open and airy chandelier has nice height, fills the high-ceilinged room like a sculpture, and because they hung the chandelier lower than would be expected, it connects the room with the vaulted space,” said Mr. Alhadeff. Its resemblance to a tree branch underlines the room’s organic, rough-hewn

vibe. The room’s fixture is by homeowner Charles de Lisle (*Vertical Linden Chandelier, \$6,100, Charles de Lisle, 415-565-6767*). An orderly alternative: *Cliff Suspension Lamp, \$925,*

Swing Low



Cliff Suspension Lamp

homes by William Wurster, the partner of the house's architect, Don Emmons," said Mr. Alhadeff. The pigment is added before the floor is poured. "It's unexpectedly cozy. I think all this cedar works because of the contrasting polished cement floor. More wood would have been too much."

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