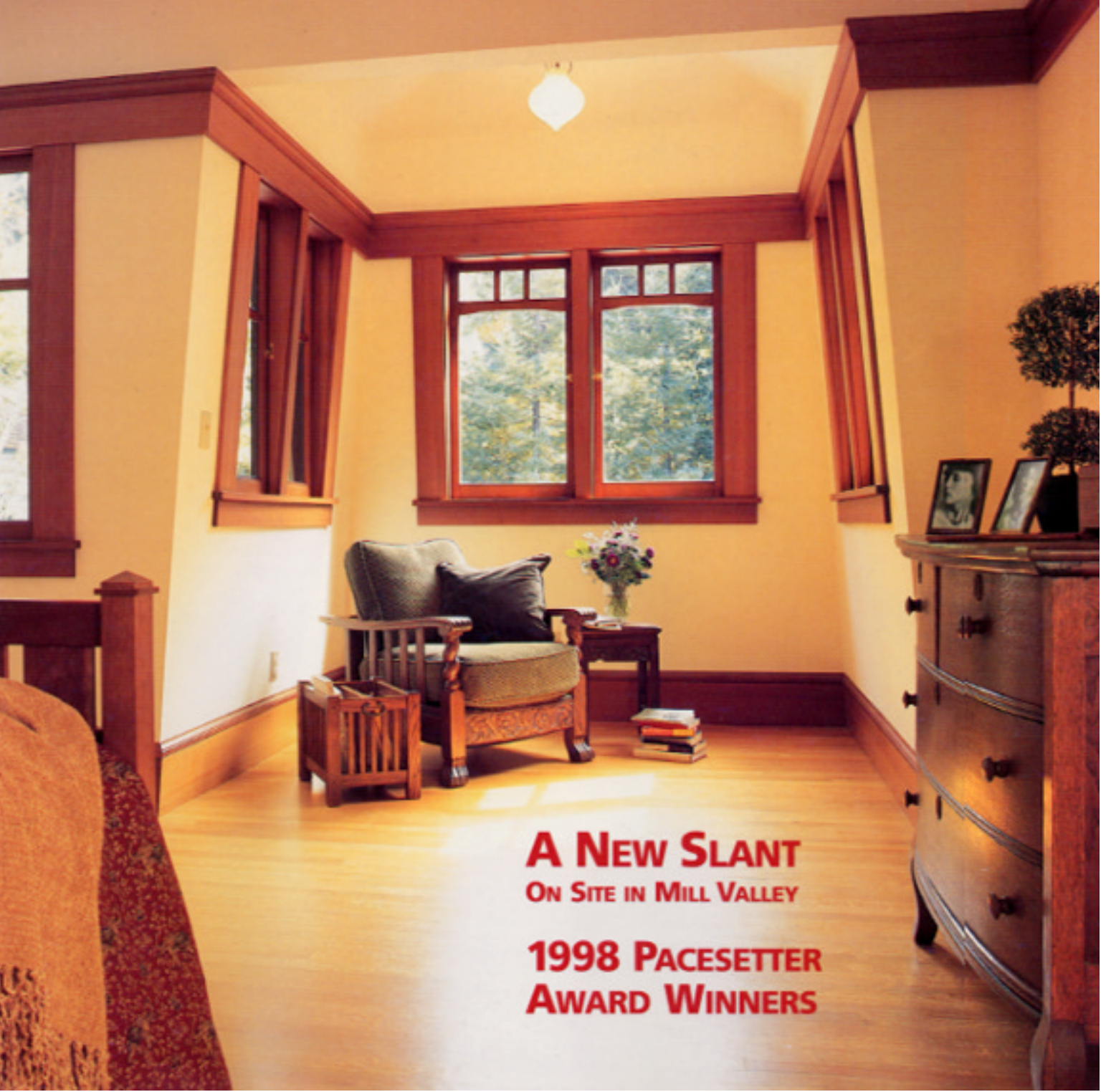


NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1998

# Custom Home

THE ART AND CRAFT OF CUSTOM HOME BUILDING / A HANLEY-WOOD, INC., PUBLICATION



**A NEW SLANT**  
ON SITE IN MILL VALLEY

**1998 PACESETTER  
AWARD WINNERS**







# A New Slant

A new kitchen/master bedroom addition telescopes from the rear of this turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts house (right). (This page) The mini-tower projection resembles historic water towers in the area.



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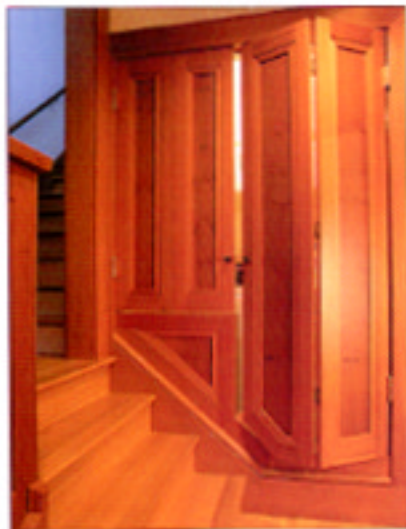
Yes, Steve Stroub drives a truck from site to site. And most of the time his golden retriever, Jib, rides shotgun. But Stroub, who got his start in San Francisco by renovating his sister's attic, is not your stereotypical pickup-truck handyman. In the 15 years since he settled in the Bay Area, he's built Stroub Construction into a highly professional, \$7-million-a-year remodeling and custom home building company. And so, the truck he drives is a snazzy Jeep Grand Cherokee and the dog—well, some habits die hard.

Although his Sausalito, Calif.-based company now builds multi-million-dollar homes, his bread-and-butter work is still exquisitely detailed, seamlessly executed remodeling projects such as this one in Mill Valley. Developed at the turn of the century as a vacation getaway for San Franciscans and named for a redwood lumber mill in the heart of town, Mill Valley has evolved into a popular bedroom community of the big city across the Golden Gate Bridge. Its assortment of houses ranges from homely to handsome and humble to historic, all nestled in the thickly wooded foothills of Mount Tamalpais. The rapid growth of this town, and of others like it throughout Marin County, has kept Stroub busy—to the tune of some 20 to 25 jobs a year. “This 1,000-or-so-square-foot addition is an average job for us,” he says. “But we’re also working on a 14,000-square-foot custom home, a \$1.3 million remodel, and a \$500,000 kitchen.” What they all have in common is their virtually flawless fit and finish, an especially neat trick if the original house is imperfect

**A FINE, OLD HOUSE GETS A YOUTHFUL SPIN.** BY S. CLAIRE CONROY



## Details: Cleaning Solution



Even more than new construction, remodeling is about problem solving. Architect Dan Phipps struggled with the location of the laundry for some time. "We thought about putting it in the basement," he recalls, "but it's an important part of the clients' lives." He and the couple, who have 2-year-old twins, settled on this built-in laundry enclosure, tucked conveniently into the stair hall off the family room. Utilitarian but beautiful, it's a true Arts and Crafts touch.—S.C.C.

to begin with. While this 1913 Arts and Crafts two-story had good bones, its somewhat battered flesh needed a lot of work.

The owners, young parents-to-be, fell in love with the old, richly detailed house but decided from the start they couldn't live in it without a major remodel. They hired architect Dan Phipps, for whom the wife had once worked, to reconfigure some existing spaces and design a new kitchen, family room, and master bedroom addition. Phipps recommended Stroub to his clients, confident the builder's team could implement his precise, demanding designs. "I think Steve is very good," says the architect. "We have 12 or so jobs together under our belt, and we have a familiarity with his staff. They're team players—not adversarial at all. They take responsibility for what they do, and that's great to work with."

Stroub also likes working with Phipps. He loves the high-end clients Phipps brings him and the sophisticated designs that showcase his company's craftsmanship. But he knows to stay sharp on the architect's projects. "When you do Dan's jobs, they're tricky," he explains. "When you're framing and putting concrete in, you have to have all the finishes laid out. You basically build from the finishes back."

"I don't claim to always make it easy for the builder," says Phipps. Here, his design proved as challenging as ever, but, he notes, "It's a carpenter's dream." He took his cues from the best of the old house—the gingerbread detailing of its front gable, its deep tongue-and-groove-lined overhangs, and its reassuring, wide-tailed squat on the land. All of these elements turn up in the new rear elevation, but with a twist. A tapered tower-like projection jazzes up the new facade without hitting a false note. Inside, the volume holds a first-floor mud room and creates a second-floor reading nook in the master bedroom. The nook also contains a restored window designed by Greene and Greene, renowned masters of the Arts and Crafts movement.

For his interior design, Phipps drew inspiration from the living and dining rooms' thickly trimmed windows, chunky baseboards, paneled walls, beamed ceilings, and sturdy hutches. "We were trying to be in harmony with—but not copy—everything that was there. The place has a woody, clubby feel," he says.



\*RENOVATED AREAS ARE INDICATED IN ORANGE

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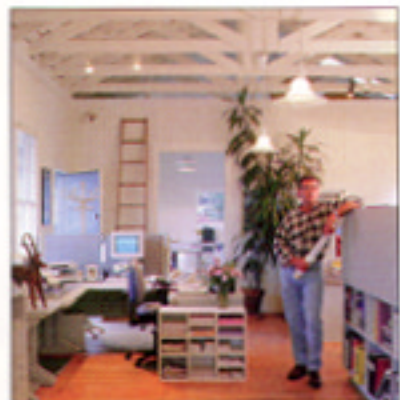






New custom, true divided-light windows and a built-in storage hutch blend splendidly with a recycled accordion window in the family room addition.





When builder/remodeler Steve Stroub came to San Francisco in the early '80s, he couldn't have picked a better time. Although the area was thick with talented craftsmen, they lacked a sense of urgency. Jobs dragged on forever, frustrating clients and bloating budgets. With a background as a carpenter doing production work in New Jersey, Stroub had a "get-it-done mentality" that made him instantly popular in his new home base. ■ "When I

came out here I saw what I really wanted to do," he says. "I came out to renovate my sister's attic. She'd gotten a quote of \$40,000 from another contractor, who still couldn't get himself together to do it. So I did it for her and finished it quickly, then all her friends saw it and asked, 'Hey, can you do my place?'" ■ More than 15 years later, he's still cranking through jobs without sacrificing quality. "I have an East Coast sense of urgency," he says. "And that's the kind of people I want to hire. Both my project managers are from New York. And I just fired a lead guy with a truck and a dog because he had no sense of urgency."—S.C.C.

#### Project Credits:

Builder: Stroub Construction, Sausalito, Calif.  
Architect: Dan Phipps and Associates, San Francisco  
Living Space: 3,782 square feet (including 1,364 square feet of addition and remodeling)  
Site: .19 acre  
Construction Cost: \$114 per square foot  
Photography: Tom Rider Architectural Photography, except where noted

#### Resources:

Bathtub: Kohler, Circle 400  
Cabinetry: Western Designs, Circle 401  
Dishwasher: KitchenAid, Circle 402  
Garbage disposal: In-Sink-Erator, Circle 403  
Hardware: Baldwin, Circle 404  
Oven: Thermador, Circle 405  
Paint: Pratt & Lambert, Circle 406  
Refrigerator: KitchenAid, Circle 407  
Shower doors: American Shower Doors, Circle 408  
Sinks: Elkay, Circle 409  
Windows: P&K Woodworks, Circle 410

"Each project develops its own language, and you get a sense for what might be a non sequitur. On a renovation, you just start with more context."

It was Stroub's job to speak that language—to match materials (woods, tiles, stone) and craft (saw cuts, nail heads, trim joinery). As they do in the dining room, redwood box beams crisscross the ceiling in the new kitchen/family room and marry with cherry cabinetry trimmed up to the ceiling. And new custom windows harmonize with an old accordion window, reconditioned and relocated from the former study to the family room's south wall. "A lot of work went into getting just the right fit," says the builder. "And that's really the key to renovation work—matching details. You have to custom build everything to match, inside and out—the same rafter ends, the same gutter profile, the same scupper."

The way he and his team ply their trade makes for precise, painstaking work not unlike surgery, says Stroub, who's made a firsthand comparison of the two disciplines. "I recently had neck surgery to fuse some vertebrae, and I started comparing notes with my doctor," he explains. "I told her how we dutchman wood together, and she told me how they put bones together. It turns out we use the same tools, like routers, and similar techniques." There they were, two talented artists, speaking each other's language. ■







In the new kitchen, granite counters have architect Phipps' trademark beveled edges. He based the cabinetry and ceiling beams on the dining room's scheme.