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At Home: Designer's cottage showcases connection between indoor, outdoor

By: Brigid Gaffikin
Special to The Examiner
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SAN FRANCISCO — At first glance, Alma Hecht's Glen Park home seems like a doll house on a postage stamp lot. It's an earthquake cottage built in 1906 that's almost dwarfed by the pocket-sized garden surrounding it.



"Because I'm a landscape designer and an interior designer, I know how to integrate front and back." -- Alma Hecht (Mike Koozmin/Special to The Examiner)

But inside, the home expands as if by magic. Upstairs, outdoor and garden furnishings and a half-enclosed front deck blur the distinction between interior and exterior.

"Because I'm a landscape designer and an interior designer, I know how to integrate front and back," Hecht explained.

At Home: Alma Hecht gallery

From her living room, she pointed to a ceramic water spill jar in the front garden that matches the rust red upholstery of the chair she is sitting in.

"When you think in terms of integrating the inside and the outside, you double your space, and for a small cottage that is essential. There's nothing in there that doesn't have two purposes," she said.

The garden itself is a showcase for native Californian plants and will be featured in the California Native Plant Society's garden tour today.

Hecht doubled the original floor plan by digging out a second floor below the 500-square-foot cottage.

A studio, guest room, library and a tiny bathroom — and even closet space — are tucked into a lower level that makes artful use of French doors along angled walls and adopts unusual room geometries.

"It was a fun puzzle to solve," she said.

A old, wooden Moroccan screen placed in the stairwell creates the feeling of

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more space and light even as the earthy orange of the walls around it draw the eye down to the lower level.

"In a small space, the one thing you can do beyond integrating your outside with your inside is to put mirrors in places," she said. "It doubles the space, so you have this illusion it's actually leading out somewhere."

Hecht used sustainable materials and refurbished furniture throughout the home. The walls are colored with zero-VOC paints or tinted American plaster, and the sustainably harvested cork tile flooring is backed by recycled rubber.

"I love going to old antique stores and I also love scouring through the furniture that's left on the streets. I've been known to Dumpster dive," she said.

She made a coffee table in her living room from an old iron stool and a glass disk.

In the kitchen, Hecht filled in a door that once led directly to the bathroom and built cabinetry from old windows and doors.

A bookshelf abutting the stove — a vintage O'Keefe and Merritt — looks onto the living room and helps separate the kitchen from the rest of the house.

"This just works perfectly as a room divider," she said.

Style Keys

Favorite colors: Earth tones: reds, oranges and greens

Favorite rooms: Kitchen and the partially enclosed maple-floored front verandah

Favorite store: Building Resources

Favorite place: Sitting in the living room looking out at the tall flowering currant bush Hecht planted when it was 2 inches tall

Small space tip: Unify and widen a series of room with a single color and a pale ceiling

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