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Home & Garden

A LOS ALTOS TOWN CRIER PUBLICATION • FALL 2023



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WONDERFUL WORKSHOPS

*At-home creators
make space for their passions*

PLUS: JUST ADD PURPLE • SOMETIMES, MORE IS MORE

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– Katy, Sevilla Drive seller

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– Wendy, Mountain View Avenue seller

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ON THE COVER:
Magician and business owner Andrew Evans crafts the props for many of his most successful illusions in his Los Altos Hills garage. *PHOTO BY JENNAH PENDLETON.*



WONDERFUL WORKSHOPS

AT-HOME CREATORS MAKE SPACE FOR THEIR PASSIONS

BY CAROLYN SNYDER
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

The places where people pursue their passions often are not as special as they are. Cases in point, the ordinary home settings where three local residents are creating magic, modern art and music.

Andrew Evans, who has gained acclaim for his Magic Patio enterprise, builds stage props, as well as furniture, in the roughly 200-square-foot garage adjoining the Los Altos Hills home built by his grandparents decades ago.

Avid art collector Rana Davis, at age 67, dove into her own personal art practice while coming out of the pandemic and landed on Plexiglass and computers as her media of choice. Her creative space in her Los Altos home is basically a computer desk.

Retired electrical engineer and guitarist Bill Brown not only makes music, but also made the furniture in his studio, a repurposed bedroom in the Los Altos home he shares with

his wife, Phyllis.

The “where” is pretty straightforward, but what about the “how” and “why”? A trio of house calls provided some answers.

MAESTRO OF THE MAGIC PATIO

Andrew Evans, a magician, was in his garage workshop surrounded by the tools of his trade – the design and building part of it, that is. But he couldn’t make a deck of cards magically appear when asked to do a trick, so he used what was on hand to create an interactive experience and pulled a little plastic disk out of his ear.

Indeed, the first magic trick he did at age 6 was the same thing, using a quarter, a skill he learned from a VHS tape.

Today, he has an engineering degree from Brown University and did postgraduate work at the Rhode Island School of Design and Stanford

University, where he was a teaching assistant in the design program. He even designed and built tree houses in the Pacific Northwest for a while. (He’s proud of the one he built in his neighbor’s yard in Los Altos Hills.)

When he moved to an apartment in the San Francisco Mission/Bernal neighborhood 10 years ago, Evans imagined more than barbecues on his patio. With a 10-person team, he began building a 45-person theater with a secret entrance, bar and box office that doubled as his bedroom. The Magic Patio was born.

After putting on patio performances from May to November for five years, Evans had enough of a following, he said, to “make it a full-time gig,” moving to a new venue just down the street from his old apartment. The unassuming facade is a candy store and a library showcasing his impressive collection of magic books. ➤



Andrew Evans' magic shows rely on his skills as a designer and engineer. He makes many of his illusion props, as well as fun personal projects, from his Los Altos Hills garage. PHOTO BY JENNAH PENDLETON

"It's very secretive," Evans said. During the pandemic, he did online and private functions, but the experience was still magical. He's back to performing live shows Fridays and Saturdays. In his own words, he creates "one-of-a-kind tricks inspired by

“Surrounding myself with interesting, fun and beautiful things brings me much joy and inspiration.”
~ RANA DAVIS

Old School magic rather than re-creating it.” For example, he makes his performing partner’s reclining body disappear, with the exception of her head and feet. And he’s been known to levitate in a snowstorm on the Magic Patio stage. “It’s kind of fun,” he said.

FROM PLASTIC TEA SET TO PLEXIGLASS

Rana Davis always has been enamored with design and art, and jokes that she married her husband, Art, an investment banker, because of his name. Their Los Altos home is a showcase for contemporary art. “Surrounding myself with interesting, fun and beautiful things brings me much joy and inspiration,” Davis said.

During the cloistered days of the pandemic, her surroundings inspired her to create her own art form using Plexiglass. Davis comes from an arts background – the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design in San Francisco, a stint with famed jewelry designer Aldo Cipullo in New York and art history studies at UC Berkeley. She later studied graphic design. “The timing seemed just right,” Davis said. Indeed, she recently sold 12 of her pieces to YouTube corporate headquarters in San Bruno. Davis calls herself a laser artist and Plexiglass sculptor. Her 3D pieces are composed of colorful abstract shapes. Like Evans, Davis too was 6 when she fell in love with something – in this case, the gift of a neon plastic tea set.



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“It sticks with me to this day. Light and color traveling through each other. ... It was mesmerizing and still is,” she recalled.

Hence the choice of Plexiglass. Davis set up shop at her home desktop computer.

“All my designs start by staring at a blank computer screen and drawing experimental vector shapes in Adobe

Rana Davis designs most of her colorful and complex art from her home office. PHOTO BY SHELLY BOWERS



Illustrator, followed by continual manipulation and countless versions until there is an ‘aha moment’ when I know I’m done,” she said.

She converts her design files to pattern pieces in LightBurn software and cuts them on an industrial laser cutter at Maker Nexus in Sunnyvale. Her only limitations are the colors of available materials and the maximum surface of the laser cutter. Her kaleidoscope of Plexiglass and other supplies are stored in a spare room.

“Plexiglass Prozac” is one way she refers to her pieces, because she hopes the bright colors, fanciful shapes and color interplay make people happy.

A NOTABLE MUSIC MAKER

Music is a language, guitarist Bill Brown believes, and his entire family was fluent. He and his wife, Phyllis, bonded over music when they first met in 1966. And their two children joined the chorus.

“I can’t sing,” Brown said, as he sat in his home studio among the

paraphernalia it takes to create and record music.

But his wife and daughter certainly could. The boys (he and their son) played guitar; the girls, piano or guitar. And, as the expression goes, they made beautiful music together.

When Brown was looking ahead to his retirement after 30 years with Hewlett-Packard, he gave serious thought to what he wanted to do. He decided he wanted to remodel their poorly insulated home himself and take his guitar playing to the next level.

It took him 10 years to remodel the house, going from room to room, taking each down to the studs. During the process, he took up woodworking and crafted all the cabinetry himself. He designed and built the work desk in his “studio” from about \$1,000 worth of maple boards.

Brown, who took guitar lessons as a child, resumed them and, as he progressed, occasionally subbed for his instructor at musical gigs. ➤



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– Debra T. Home Seller



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Bill Brown designed and built the work desk in his at-home music studio with about \$1,000 worth of maple boards. COURTESY OF BILL BROWN

As a “competent” guitarist, he chalked up 13 shows, or approximately 130 performances, with Sunnyvale and Saratoga community theater groups, as well as playing in the Los Altos Stage Company Follies.

Five years ago, he joined forces with Rory Van Tuyl, also of Los Altos, and they’ve been “covering,” or recording new versions of cover songs. Van Tuyl sings the lead and Brown harmonizes.

“I still can’t sing,” Brown said.

Brown has six guitars and plays daily. His favorite is the one he is holding at the moment. ✨

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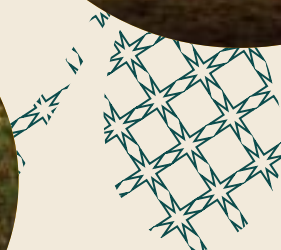
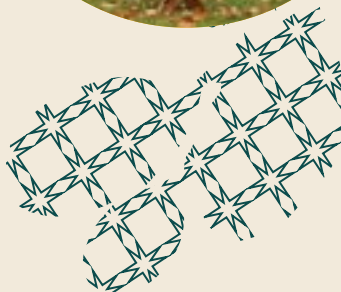


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DESIGNING
BEDROOMS IS A
FAMILY AFFAIR

BY ANNABELLE EATON
TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

Over a span of more than 10 years, my parents constructed and designed bedrooms for their four girls using a sketch and hand-drawn map. >



Clara Eaton and her mother, Cindy Levin Eaton, teamed up to design a stylish yet age-appropriate bedroom from the ground up. PHOTOS BY JENNAH PENDLETON



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“We started out almost everything just hand-sketching in 3D,” my dad, Brook Eaton, said. “I mapped the floor-plan layouts, which made a map of our ideas for the bedroom from a bird’s-eye view.”

When they began construction on my sister Clara’s bedroom a few years ago, the last of the bedrooms in our Los Altos Hills home, they were well acquainted with taking up the mantle of an architect or interior designer.

“Most of the additions were the brainchild of (Brook),” said my mom, Cindy. “He could imagine going out onto the roof and building another room. He imagined opening that door into a bedroom instead of the patio.”

My dad acted as the architect for my sister’s room. He drew most of the maps and analyzed the Los Altos Hills building code. With my mom’s help, he could establish the spacing of the room with measured paper cutouts.

“You draw out the room the way that it is on a piece of graph paper –



you make each square a square foot, and then you make the bed the size of however many squares the bed is,” Cindy said. “Then you can move it around the room.”

Once those plans were created, it was Cindy’s job to create the space. Her interior design began with

a judgment of the room and the architectural space.

“In Clara’s room, you have those beams ... so a lot of it was thinking through how you might want to work with those design features that you don’t like,” Cindy said. “Either embrace them ... as if they’re the ➤

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focal point of your room or get them to blend into the background.”

She chose the latter, painting the walls and ceiling the same color to help them blend with the room. Cindy said she could make a room age-appropriate but timeless by including distinctive furniture pieces, colors and designs that aligned with my sister’s requests. In Clara’s room, that included a combination of coordinated furniture with a few statement elements.

“The style was in the color and the bedding and the walls, so having some neutral pieces in there worked well,” Cindy said. “But I think that every bedroom should have a unique piece that makes it look a little bit more curated and a little less like I went to the furniture store and bought a set.”

My mom chose the furniture with my sister, painted the walls purple and placed the finishing touches with the lighting of the room. In Clara’s room, light enters from windows in the east and west, making a centerpiece lighting fixture the best for the space.

“(Clara) has natural lighting from the big windows in her room and then she also has the ambient lighting from the lamp on her desk or the lamp on her nightstand,” Cindy said. “Her glass chandelier adds a great element and fits with the more ornate style.”

My mom incorporated elements of this same traditional theme, while also staying consistent with the rest of



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the house. The woodwork and architecture match the Craftsman style of the house just as the furniture and colors are unique to Clara’s room.

“You don’t want to walk into a room and be like, ‘Wow, the rest of the house is like a 1920s Craftsman and this room looks like a modern masterpiece,’” Cindy said.

Cindy added that she did not use an interior designer, “but if you can get somebody who’s familiar with ... the code in your town ... then that’s going to help you a lot.”

In the end, my parents created a room from the ground up. It is unique to my sister and, most importantly, it is purple.

“I told her that I wanted a lot of purple in the room, and she definitely delivered,” Clara said. ✨



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SOMETIMES, MORE IS MORE: CONTEMPORARY GLAMOUR DONE WELL

When I found out that “maximalism” was trending, I was apprehensive. I’m drawn to clean, fresh spaces without a lot of clutter. I envisioned maximalism as the chaotic opposite of minimalism, the Scandinavian-inspired movement built on simplicity in design.

But when I met renowned interior designer Mary McDonald at a book signing, I realized that she was one designer doing maximalism exceptionally well. Even her personal style – such as the inherited lockets dangling like charms from her necklace – revealed her mastery at balancing simple elegance with ornate adornment. ➤

Mixing and matching modern and classic design elements can create a fresh and fun yet timeless look. PHOTOS BY CAYLA KITA



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Design elements like a painted ceiling can bring both maximalism and glamour to your space. PHOTO BY CAYLA KITA

Her newest wallpaper and fabrics line for Schumacher is no exception. Inspired by 17th- and 18th-century gardens, designs like Shell Grotto incorporate classical architectural forms and seashells of many shapes, sizes and colors. She cites Chinese porcelain, Portuguese tilework and Swedish architecture as influences for her new line. McDonald deftly mixes global influence and historical scenes to create something that is uniquely hers.

REDEFINING GLAMOUR

In a recent interview with Schumacher, McDonald explains that glamour in design doesn't necessarily have to be sparkly or shiny. It can be anything that gives you a sense of the dramatic or theatrical. ➤

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Interior designer Mary McDonald incorporates classical imagery and global influence in her fabric line for Schumacher. PHOTO BY MARGARET RUFFO

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A foyer or other small space is ideal to create this effect because it's controlled. Layering elements like graphic painted floors or saturated color on the walls or ceiling can create this effect without feeling overwhelming.

Mixing textures such as lacquer, crystal and velvet elevates any space and makes it feel luxurious. Look to the past for inspiration: The historical homes of England, Italy and France feature a mix of stone, tile, wood and textiles to create drama and interest.

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Large-scale pieces of art create warmth and familiarity within a room.
PHOTO BY CAYLA KITA

Pick motifs that speak to you and your sense of style; this is an easy way to experiment on a small level and then go big once you find what you love.

SCALE UP

To bring modern glamour to your space, bigger is better. Large-scale objects such as pedestals, urns and paintings with gilded frames are reminiscent of a museum. A crystal chandelier is stunning, whether mixed with more classic or contemporary design elements.

Begin with one large-scale piece in one room and experiment from there. A big marble vase filled with flowering branches makes a statement on a side table or atop a fireplace. A singular piece of art taking up much of one wall lends formality without feeling cold. A huge bookcase can take up an entire wall; paint it dark blue or eggplant for maximum effect against a white wall, and fill it with books of all colors.

CONTRAST IS KEY

Contrast can both elevate and tie together disparate elements. White molding pops against a ceiling painted in a saturated hue. Pair deep color with something light for freshness. The higher the contrast, the better.

In the kitchen, I love painting cabinets navy and topping the center island with a contrasting white and gray marble countertop. For a bathroom, black tile provides a gorgeous foundation for mixed metal fixtures and white cabinets.

The key to a “more is more” design philosophy is Mary McDonald-style confidence. Adding large-scale pieces, elements of striking contrast and influences of classical European design doesn’t have to be scary. Timeless glamour is within reach. ❀

Celeste Randolph is an interior designer in Los Altos.

*For more information,
visit celesterandolphdesigns.com.*



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These Fire District programs can help make you safer from wildfire.

Going Firewise may save you money!

Residents participating in the NFPA Firewise USA® Program may be eligible for homeowner insurance discounts! The program teaches residents how to prepare their homes and properties against the threat of wildfire and how to become a more resilient community. LAHCFD is here to support those efforts and help navigate the program.

BENEFITS:

- Learn about wildfire preparation and fire science.
- Participate in building a safer community.
- May receive insurance discounts.
- Get access to funding and assistance.
- Be involved in wildfire preparedness planning for your property and your neighborhood.



LEARN MORE



bit.ly/firewiselahcfd

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firewiseinfo@lahcfd.org

A Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Assessment may reduce your home's wildfire risk!

An HIZ Assessment is an onsite evaluation of your home and property that identifies elements around your property that pose an increased risk of ignition in the event of a wildfire.

Upon registration, a representative from Santa Clara County FireSafe Council will contact you to schedule a guided walkthrough of your property, provide real-time feedback, and answer your questions.



RED BOUNDARY: IMMEDIATE ZONE: 0' TO 5'
ORANGE BOUNDARY: INTERMEDIATE ZONE: 5' TO 30'
GREEN BOUNDARY: EXTENDED ZONE: 30' TO 100'
DARK GREEN BOUNDARY: DOWNSLOPE EXTENDED ZONE: UP TO 200'

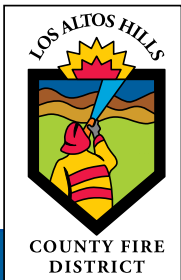
PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE:

- Personalized on-site property assessment with a trained assessor,
- Recommendations on how to create defensible space around home and structures to lower fire risk and protect life and property.

LEARN MORE



www.lahcfd.org/hiz-program/



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