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A clean, well-lighted space for art and living.

features

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It used to be a cramped, dark mid-century ranch house on an Alamo hill. Now, it's an airy, art-filled domestic paradise for a San Francisco architect who loves clean, simple lines, comfort, and the great outdoors.

By LeeAnne Carson

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Middle schoolers may not be ready to date, but that doesn't mean they're not having sex. Sadly, a lot of our local kids are rushing into situations they're too young to handle. Here's what parents need to know about a disturbing new trend in our community.

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Enhancing the cosmopolitan profile of Walnut Creek's downtown dining scene, Ephesus Kebab Lounge wows more than taste buds as it pays homage to traditional Mediterranean cuisine in a chic, 21st-century setting.

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A GALLERY OPENING (previous pages) It doesn't take long before something catches your eye at Jerry Dommer and Jan Hopson's house, including this 1975 body cast by Richard Bauer. (this page) A studio, pool, main house, and 400-year-old oak greet visitors. (opposite page) A collection of Dommer-crafted pots share space with some of Alamo's Diablo Country; the museum-quality kitchen.

The living room couch. For some people

it's a place to lounge while watching the big game or reading a book. But for Jerry Dommer, it's an art lover's perch. Surrounding his comfy sectional are crisp white walls dressed with eye-catching paintings and photographs; pottery and sculpture sit immaculately arranged on shelves under track lighting. It's so well thought-out, you're tempted to look around to see if he's hired a security guard to complete the gallery feel.

But curator Dommer has always possessed an eye for aesthetics. By day he designs luxury subdivisions, civic buildings, and office high-rises for his San Francisco-based architectural firm, Dommer & Byars. By night he tinkers with designs for his own home and his art collection. "My whole world is visual," he says. "I'm attracted to the way things look and how they're composed."

It was the beauty of the Mount Diablo foothills that lured Jerry and his wife, Jan Hopson, from Berkeley to this Alamo home in 2001. "We wanted to get out to the edge

of civilization," says Dommer. Taking in the view from the home's expansive deck, they felt unfettered, a mood that continues indoors courtesy of Kurt Lavenson, a fellow architect and the house's previous owner. Lavenson spent two years transforming a typical mid-century rancher into a wide-open modern space with windows big enough to bring in that great outdoors.

At first, Dommer and Hopson were happy with the house. They enjoyed riding their two horses on adjacent open space and in Mount Diablo State Park, or relaxing in the shade of a 400-year-old oak. But being an architect, Dommer wanted to put his own stamp on the home. He envisioned simplifying the spaces even more, freeing them up to be not only functional, but also an appropriate setting to display the couple's growing art collection. While writer Hopson worked away in her spacious study, Dommer expanded the kitchen, adding cabinets and granite counters.

Finding the overall feel of the interior too "moody," he covered the 1950s dark-wood







FUNCTIONAL ART

(previous pages) Toss a log on the fire and it's a tough choice: gaze at the 1985 Maxim monoprint or take in the view floating in the background like a Monet? (this page) The art seasoning the home includes this ram's head from Mali; a Nimba, goddess of fecundity for Africa's Baga people; a 1970 steel sculpture by Joe Slusky. (opposite) Tyler the dog and a Dale Appleman painting hang in the study of Dommer's wife, writer Jan Hopson.

tongue-and-groove ceiling with Sheetrock, popped in several skylights, and covered everything but the floor in white paint. The transformation was not subtle. "I'm basically a modernist," says Dommer. "You could display art in any type of room, but I always end up with white walls and absolutely no curtains—never. I find clean, bright spaces uplifting.

"Visitors often comment, 'Gee, your house is kind of like an art gallery' ... but not as a compliment," he says. "It's too stark for some people." But for Dommer and Hopson, crisp and clean is home sweet home. And when they pop a log into the fireplace Lavenson created from steel construction beams, it's not hard to feel comfortable.

On the walls hang photos by Chris Bratt (yes, he's related to actor Benjamin), sculptures by Joe Slusky and Richard Bauer, and paintings by Dale Appleman and Maxim, plus some Picasso etchings and Richard Diebenkorn prints. Also in the mix are Dommer's own creations, including pottery he fires in a kiln out back and 20-year-old paintings, one of which remains unfinished.

His Rauschenberg-esque collage and the clusters of earth-toned pots are a far cry from Dommer's first artistic efforts. At age five, he was copying and painting Disney characters. Dommer continued drawing and painting

through high school, then his older brother Don's architecture homework caught his eye. "When I was in high school," he says, "[Don] was building models for his college courses and doing fun-looking things."

Dommer studied architecture at the University of Minnesota, but kept his hand in fine arts. He took enough ceramics classes to earn an M.F.A., if he had made it official. But architecture won out in the end—professionally at least. Dommer spent some time after college working in Chicago and Vienna. Four years after graduating, he came to San Francisco, and in 1975 he started his own firm. Dommer & Byars's designs run the gamut from educational and industrial to civic and residential projects. Dommer drafted the winning design for the Amsterdam City Hall, and he's been an expert witness in construction disputes for the last 15 years. He's currently working on designs for a new hospital and a resort/casino, as well as putting the finishing touches on the Round Hill Country Club's tennis clubhouse.

As for his own home, Dommer is still tinkering. He plans to build an extended entryway with walls of glass, a true foyer gallery. "Then I hope to quit," he says. But who can believe him? Just like his unfinished painting, Dommer's house will likely always remain a work in progress. ■

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