



# THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

After three times at bat,  
architect Lewis Butler nails it

by **MARY JO BOWLING** photography by **PATRIK ARGAST**



**THIS PAGE:** For this restaurant-owning family, function and style are paramount. That means stainless steel cabinets, a distressed copper backsplash, leather-textured black granite and statuary marble. The Pelleossa stools are by Miniforms; the Jamaica light fixture is by Foscarini. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The traditional trim gets a fresh look with Summer Nights blue by Benjamin Moore.



**TOP:** The mirror-and-mesh Versailles tile by Ann Sacks reflects a gallery wall in the powder room. A sink from Kerasan's WS Bath Collection is topped by a Tara Logic Dornbracht faucet. **BOTTOM:** With a net on the ceiling, grips on a climbing wall and oversize custom-made cushions on the floor, there's space for recreation or relaxation in the playroom.



**WHEN ARCHITECT LEWIS BUTLER** met his new clients outside of their just-purchased home in San Francisco's Ashbury Heights, he couldn't help but feel excited. It was his third time at this particular rodeo, and with new clients who err on the side of modernism, he felt that the opportunity to do big things was at hand.

The house was, and still is on the exterior, a large, stately Tudor built in 1906 as far as anyone can tell (things get a bit vague in the years around the cataclysmic quake that devastated the city and many building records). Butler knew it better than perhaps anyone else. "I had worked for two previous owners. One wanted me to redo it somewhat, but keep it original. The second had more modest

plans for the house," Butler explains. "When I met this family, I could tell they wanted to do something better than good, and I felt we would get it really right this time."

If the couple's real estate agent had her way, they would never have had the chance. "We had lived in the neighborhood for years and loved the Victorians here and their amazing details. When this house came on the market, we wanted to see it, but our agent resisted showing it to us," says the owner. "Its layout was choppy, it had no garage and there wasn't good access to the backyard. But we looked at it as a chance to start over and make a clean slate of it."

With that in mind, Butler set out to rewrite history as well as a new chapter for the home. The grand

A large landing becomes a lounge for the four children in the family. The Knoll D'Urso sofa sits beside a Gentle Giant lamp by Control Brand and behind a Blu Dot coffee table that doubles as a stuffed-animal pen. Nigel Poor created art using the family's thumbprints and Christoph Draeger crafted the black-and-white blimp art with jigsaw puzzle pieces.

lines of the front facade largely remain, although they are given a fresh, blue hue. Inside, the home was completely reconfigured, with a large, open-plan living room, kitchen and dining room on the first floor; kids' rooms and an open landing playroom on the second floor and an uppermost level that serves as an adult sanctuary.

"This area is an exciting part of San Francisco where houses sit at an angle to the street and to views of the city. After wrestling with the floorplan, we decided to take the walls out on the main floor, making it essentially a five-room space if you count the entry, pantry, office and bathroom," says Butler. "Glass windows and doors on the rear facade make the house seem like a lightbox. They also take advantage of extraordinary views and lead to decks and stairs that connect the house to the backyard."

The couple's four kids and an ever-expanding art collection inspired a large part of the design. "Making the kitchen central was key for my family," says the owner. "My wife owns Pica Pica Arepa Kitchen in the Mission, and she loves to cook—and now my daughter does too. You can usually find our family lined up at the 13-foot counter or sitting around the large table in the kitchen."

That restaurant connection led interior designers at Butler Armsden to select stainless steel cabinets and a patinaed copper backsplash. "We wanted a professional grade kitchen that didn't feel too sterile," says Butler.



A pair of Falcon chairs by Sigurd Ressel, a Groundpiece sofa from Flexform and a caramel-colored Onda sofa by Giovanni Offredi surround a coffee table designed by the architects.





**THIS PAGE LEFT:** Existing light fixtures were reconfigured and elongated in order to hang in the center of the modern staircase. **RIGHT:** A large round table just off the kitchen makes room for family gatherings. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** New decks and stairs connect the house to the backyard.

Artwork and mid-century furniture dominate the living space. “My wife and I collect art, and we keep adding to it with the help of Lisa Lindenbaum of Lindenbaum Art Advisory,” says the owner. “We wanted spaces where we could display the art, and room to add more or shift works as the collection changes and grows.”

The newly expanded room did pose furnishing challenges. “Look, this is a big, heavily used space, and we had to make a few attempts to get the seating just right,” says Butler. “We solved it by breaking it down into four seating arrangements. There are places for large and small gatherings—including a corner library where I understand the grandparents like to enjoy a cocktail.”

The second level is dedicated to the kids. Here a



landing is outfitted with an oversize floor lamp and serves as a place to read, and each child’s room displays a unique personality. (With a ceiling net, climbing wall and oversize floor cushions, the playroom on the lowest level is dedicated to activity.)

The top floor is where the adults in the room can get away but still be in touch with it all. Stairs lead to the glass-lined master suite, where the couple can see—but not necessarily hear—all that is going on. “This is like having your own pied-à-terre at home,” says Butler. “You have a room with not only a bed, but also places to read and watch television. When they want to be somewhat connected, there’s the glass wall. When they don’t, we have shades that come down. It’s a true parents’ escape.”

The owner elaborates: “We went with the glass as we were worried about being too far away from our youngest kids. On the weekends, one of us usually lets the other sleep in a bit longer with the shades pulled, while the other goes down and fixes breakfast. It was one of the hardest rooms to figure out, but I think it’s one of the best parts of the house.”

Butler considers the entire project a successful alchemy involving the old and the new. “It’s hard to describe exactly why it works, but you take a modern family with an interesting background and an old, usual home and you get an almost chemical reaction,” he says. “It’s a smashing result of two worlds colliding, and it’s made a different house. One people visit and come away talking about.”