MARIN

The Family Issue

FORM + FUNCTION

Designer Elena Calabrese's dining room includes a bookcase she designed, a Castiliglioni Arco floor lamp and a chrome dining table from Hudson Furniture. In the living room (right), there's a Camerich cloud sofa, Milo Baughman club chairs, a Kelly Wearstler reading lamp and a Moroccan side table from Tazi Designs in Sausalito.

A Mill Valley home for a couple and their son is laid-back, light-filled and modern.

BY LIZ LOGAN
PHOTOS BY JACQUELYN WARNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Another view of the living room: a heritage redwood wall, vintage Gary Gutterman chairs and a Modo chandelier from Design Within Reach. Below: Calabrese with her German shepherd, Gigi.

"Nothing's too precious," says designer Elena Calabrese of the Mill Valley home she shares with her husband, Steven Younger, and their 13-year-old son, Luca. "I often have a group of 12- and 13-year-old boys hanging out in my Milo Baughman chairs, or my son is skateboarding through the living room, right past my Kelly Wearstler lamp. My friends say I'm so chill."

Calabrese isn't chill just because she's a mom; a relaxed vibe is a key component of her California-modern design sensibility. Neutral colors are a serene backdrop for a few bold patterns, and natural touches such as plants and crystals abound. The result is a space that's both calming and playful — perfect for relaxing with family and friends. In addition to her husband and son, Calabrese's family includes three Maine Coon cats and a German shepherd.

"Yes, I have collectible vintage chairs and expensive fabrics, but there's nothing I feel I have to worry about," says Calabrese, who started her company, Elena Calabrese Design and Décor, in 2009. "Everything has to be user-friendly. We enjoy our furniture and live with it, knowing, for instance, that things will have to be reupholstered over the years. Nothing is permanent."

Calabrese studied jewelry and metal arts at California College of the Arts and worked as an accessories designer before making the transition to interior design after her son was born. In 2009, the family moved from Sausalito to this two-story, four-bedroom hillside house, trading a Bay view for more square footage and a view of Mount Tamalpais. The entryway is on the top floor, where the bedrooms are also located. Then, it's 25 feet down to the lower floor where the

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main living spaces are. In the open living room-dining room, there are nearly floor-to-ceiling windows and an impressive heritage redwood wall that has been there since the house was built in 1969. When they moved in, Calabrese had the existing flagstone fireplace retiled in alabaster ledge stone.

The main floor has an open floor plan, with a dividing wall separating the living room and dining room space from the family room, where there's an older, super comfy couch and her son's Xbox. Most of the mess of family life is hidden behind the wall, though Calabrese notes that their home is so casual that not too long ago there was a basketball hoop mounted in the living room, on the balcony where the upper floor overlooks the living room. "Nothing ever broke, except for one window, once, and that wasn't because of the basketball," she says with a laugh.
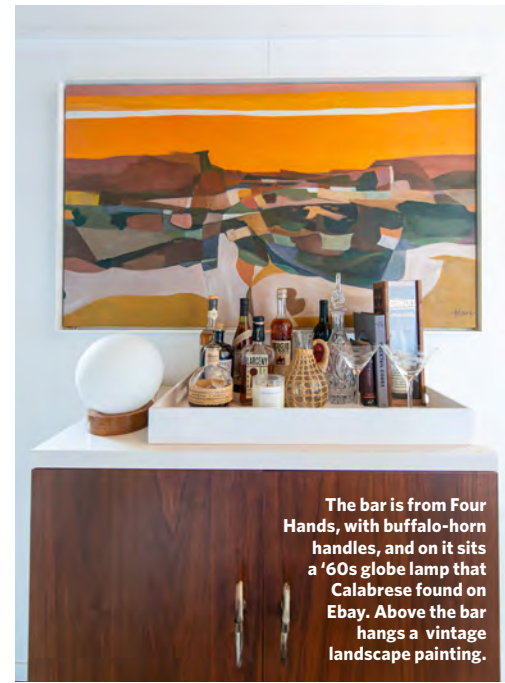
In the airy living room, there's a cream Camerich cloud sofa, accessorized with metallic and patterned pillows and a black-and-white sheepskin throw — a welcome place for a dog or cat, which means less fur on the couch itself, Calabrese explains. The chairs are vintage: two Gary Gutterman lucite chairs from the '70s, upholstered in a silvery linen, and two Milo Baughman club chairs. They flank the rustic wood coffee table, which was made from a dining table that came with the house. In the past few years Calabrese had the Baughman chairs reupholstered in Kelly Wearstler's dramatic black-and-white Graffito fabric. In fact, there's a lot of Kelly Wearstler: from a brass reading lamp to pillows Calabrese had made in Wearstler's fabrics. "Her style is modern but earthy, comfortable but chic," Calabrese says. "It's everything I'm drawn to." The carpet below is nubby, graphic and black-and-white.

"I enjoy warm black and off-white," Calabrese says. "The lack of color is calming to me, and it gives me the flexibility to bring in any color with greenery or other small details. I don't like being tied down."

Things become a bit more glam in the dining area. The dining table, from Hudson Furniture in New York City, is chrome, with a subtle snake pattern on the top, underneath glass. That was added by Calabrese's friend who is a decorative painter. One chair is upholstered in ombre French velvet, the others in gray leather. A Castiglioni Arco floor lamp curves above, and underneath the table there's a gray cowhide carpet. A wicker bird cage reading chair, like one Calabrese grew up with, is suspended from the ceiling. "It's a fun conversation piece," she says. The wall-length bookshelf, which Calabrese designed herself, is made up of rectangular nooks that are filled with her favorite art books and other mementos: vintage brass figurines, paintings by Gerry Tempest, who is one of Calabrese's relatives, and a black-and-white Howard Miller clock from her childhood home.

The dining room was once situated around the corner from the living room, but Calabrese relocated it in order to turn the dining room into a Covid-friendly cocktail lounge — the doors open to the deck. The vibe in this room, which is intended for adults, is low-key sexy. Two Milo Baughman chairs are upholstered in an Schumacher Italian brocade snakeskin fabric, and they're paired with touches of rattan in an ottoman and a mirror. A floating white laminate and walnut cabinet is Calabrese's own design. On it sits two geode lamps and an onyx bowl. Calabrese often accessorizes her interiors with stones, crystals or chunks of pyrite. "They're earthy and organic, as well as inspirational and magnetic," she says. The painting is by Danielle Mourning; it's a magnified photograph of a diamond upon which the artist then painted. A Castiglioni Taraxacum light fixture hangs overhead.

The open floor plan and unfussy décor makes for an interior that's welcoming to both adults and kids — a good thing, because the couple loves to entertain. "Nothing is too formal, nothing has a high-back," Calabrese says. "I like my décor casual but chic."

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The bar is from Four Hands, with buffalo-horn handles, and on it sits a '60s globe lamp that Calabrese found on Ebay. Above the bar hangs a vintage landscape painting.

In the cocktail lounge: Milo Baughman chairs upholstered in a snakeskin fabric, a Castiglioni light fixture, a console designed by Calabrese and painting by Danielle Mourning.