

# Datebook

Bad Reporter: The truth behind the lies ... E10

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SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Wednesday, October 13, 2010 | Section E PN

TIM GOODMAN  
Television

## Networks badly need a visionary

Hey, Steve Jobs, are you interested in running a broadcast TV network?

If any industry could use a visionary right about now, it's television. While things are going pretty swell over on the cable side, the networks have been slow to adapt to the changes around them.

Now, this should surprise almost no one. The big broadcast networks have been both blind and resistant to change for decades. The industry itself has run on archaic principles for more than 40 years, and network executives have either been unable or afraid to change them.

In a fear-based, results-oriented business where network executives have a relatively short life span, the urge to start a revolution is almost nonexistent.

Oh, people have tried. Several entertainment presidents and network chairmen have talked openly about a 52-week season (instead of the traditional September to May one that currently exists), but none of them have been able to make the notion successful.

In fact, this summer all but killed off the idea that networks will put original scripted series on the air. The audience didn't show up in sufficient numbers to

*Goodman continues on E4*

## FICTION REVIEW

### Another riveting le Carré

By Tom Nolan  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

What do you do, after spending your sociopolitical life in theoretical opposition to your country's establishment and its secret high-handed ways, when you're asked — begged — by a desperate Russian criminal, met on a tennis holiday on Antigua, to help make contact with

**Our Kind of Traitor**  
By John le Carré  
(Viking, 306 pages; \$27.95)

(and gain asylum from) those very covert powers that be?

If you're Perry Makepiece, the fed-up Oxford professor who's the more-or-less protagonist of John le Carré's swift and exciting new novel, "Our Kind of Traitor," you help him — at some risk to your safety and that of your beautiful barrister girlfriend.

The moral conundrums are all up to date in this latest example of how espionage fiction's maybe-greatest-living master has transformed his patented Cold War thriller into often-elegant chronicles of a new world disorder. Here the gray-to-black area being probed is a nexus of European crime, high finance and government — a zone where even the establishment (or at least the somewhat rogue director of

*"Traitor" continues on E3*



BEFORE

Hart Wright Architects



AFTER

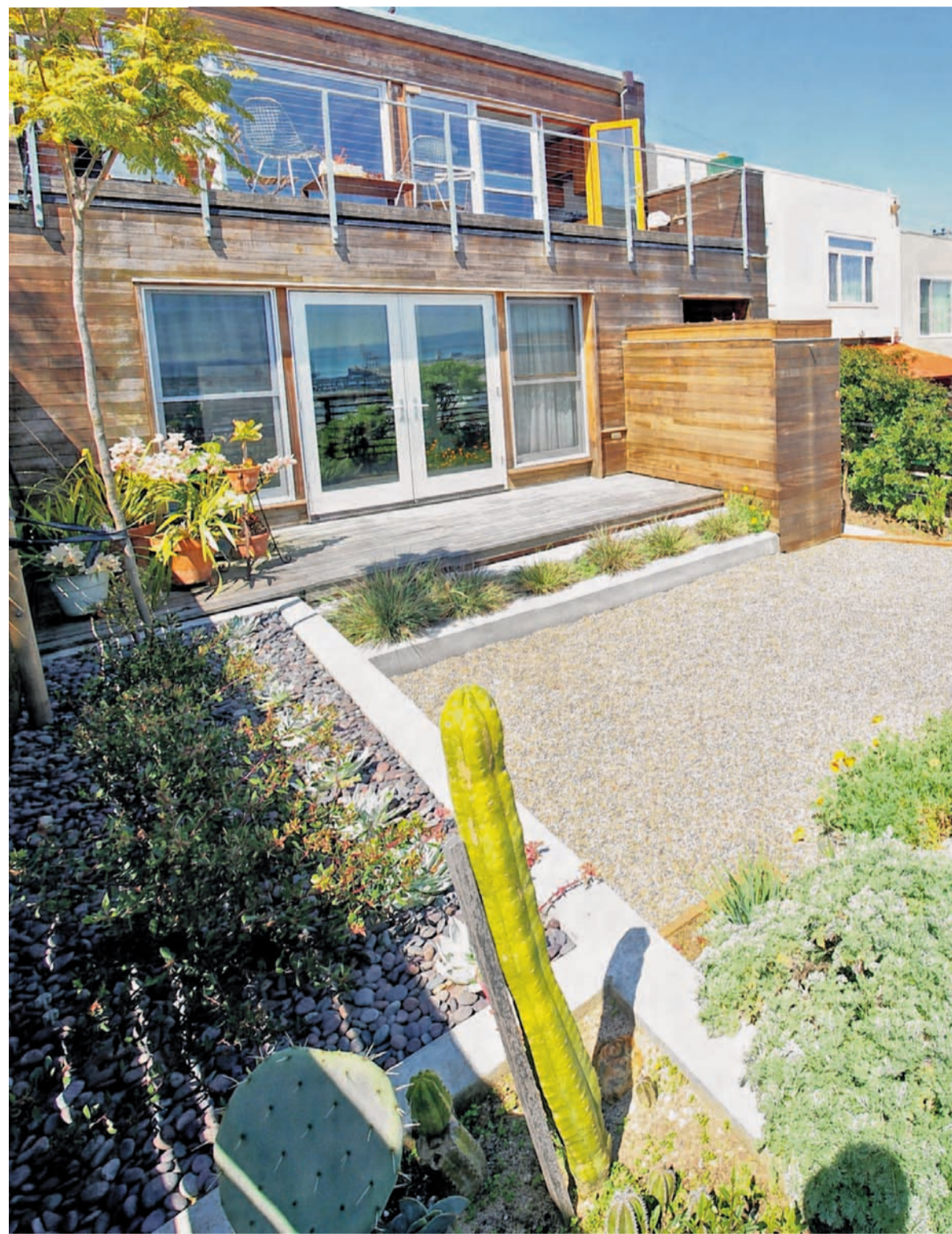
Hart Wright Architects

Architects Eliza Hart and Stuart Wright turned their 1959 Bernal Heights tract house, left, into a modern home in four years.

## HOME & GARDEN

# Hip to be square

Couple turn a boxy fixer-upper into the modern house of their dreams



Hart Wright Architects

The couple also renovated the backyard with drought-tolerant succulents and natives, above. Inside, they also designed their own furniture, like these living room coffee tables.



Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle

By Lydia Lee  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

With its patched stucco, broken back window, rotting floors, cramped rooms and dilapidated 50-year-old kitchen and bathrooms, the Bernal Heights house was perfect for architects Eliza Hart and Stuart Wright. They were determined to stay in the city, but only fixers-uppers were in their price range.

It took a year of searching before they came across the modest tract home, built in 1959. "We were blessed — it was a total wreck, but it had good bones," says Hart.

They knew that with a

**"We were blessed — it was a total wreck, but it had good bones."**

*Eliza Hart, architect and co-homeowner*

few simple moves, the nondescript two-story box could become the modern house of their dreams for a fraction of what it would take to build from scratch. To save money, they lived in the house while renovating it in stages over four years; the final cost for the renovation was less than \$200,000.

"In our own architectural practice, we focus on residential building that is high quality, custom and green," says Hart. "And besides being sustainable, renovations are a fun challenge because of their constraints — every decision has a logic to it."

The husband-and-wife team met in graduate school at UCLA, ended up working for San Francisco firm Sagan Piechota and started their own architecture firm in 2006.

From the street, it's hard to tell that the house wasn't born in this decade. The facade got a complete makeover: Wright took off all the stucco and put in western red cedar siding, with the care of a carpenter building a custom cabinet, and the corners around the entry are mitered, as they would be on a piece of well-made furniture. A long window box on the

*Fixer-upper continues on E5*

HOME & GARDEN



Photos by Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle

Stuart Wright and Eliza Hart lived in the house while renovating it in stages. They spent less than \$200,000, which included a small first-floor addition, so the kitchen and living room open onto a deck, left.

# Hip to be square in S.F.

Fixer-upper from page E1

upper floor is planted with succulents.

The overall effect is decidedly contemporary, but the handcrafted aesthetic makes it warm and inviting.

### 2 major changes

To upgrade the interior, the architects made two major changes. They took down the load-bearing wall that divided the kitchen from the living room and replaced it with a ceiling beam, creating one big open space. They also created a small first-floor addition at the back of the house, so the kitchen and living room open onto a deck.

"That was the first thing I thought when I came through the house: 'This place needs a deck, a way to get outdoors,'" says Hart. The main living spaces have a panoramic view of the city below and are bathed in natural light.

Thanks to its inside-outside connections, as well as other design strategies (see sidebar), the house feels more spacious than its 1,440 square feet.

The cozy modernism promised by the facade is delivered through the interior, which features the warmth of natural wood throughout. The stairwell is clad in western red cedar, the kitchen has rich walnut cabinetry, and the downstairs bathroom — including the shower — has walls of birch plywood sealed with marine-grade shellac. The main floors throughout are white oak, an inexpensive wood, stained a chic black.

### Custom furniture

Furnishings are sleek, contemporary and often multifunctional. Hart and Wright designed several pieces themselves, including a coffee table that splits into three sections, each opening to provide additional seating. The custom dining set they created has two side tables, which can also be used as leaves of the main dining table — handy for hosting large gatherings.

One of their fundamental strategies for making a small space feel large is the "single strong



The coffee table splits into three sections, each opening up to provide more seating in the living room.

**Hart Wright Architects:** 27 Brewster St., S.F. (415) 503-7071. [hartwrightarchitects.com](http://hartwrightarchitects.com).

move," says Wright. "Sometimes people think that when you're dealing with a small space, small-scale changes are better. But one unifying large move is actually more effective."

For instance, the two small front rooms upstairs are the same size as

they were in the original layout, but they have been invigorated with fresh paint: The back wall of the TV room is painted a bold red, and the master bedroom's back wall is a deep blue. Each room also has a ceiling pocket (a long niche right next to the window) that keeps all the drapery hardware hidden, making the ceiling feel higher. And in the downstairs office, the architects are saving up

to put in a long wall of closets, which will also conceal a Murphy bed for guests.

The first-floor addition was the most costly part of the renovation, because it involved pouring a concrete foundation, but it allowed them to create a large home office space on the ground floor. It replaced a small, dark bedroom and now opens onto the backyard, newly landscaped with drought-tolerant succulents and natives.

"I have great respect for what the architects before us accomplished," says Wright. "It was a smart house for its time — it was uber-efficient in its layout. We just brought it up to date for how people live today."

E-mail comments to [home@sfgchronicle.com](mailto:home@sfgchronicle.com).

### Space-saving strategies

Eliza Hart and Stuart Wright were able to make some major structural changes to create more room in their home, but they employed many other techniques, both large and small. Here are some of their tips.

#### Pick a good fixer-upper:

Small cottages where the entrance is in the center of the house are harder to open up, because they typically have a center corridor with bearing walls on either side. In this case, Hart and Wright had to remove only one bearing wall to achieve the open space that they wanted.

#### Radiant heating:

By retrofitting the house with radiant heating — using heat-transfer plates underneath the second story's wood floor — the couple is more comfortable in the winter. But they were also able to get rid of the furnace and a large water heater. A small tankless water heater supplies hot water and heat. "We used the space for a coat closet, right by the entrance," says Hart.

**Layered lighting:** A mix of lighting gives a small space

a depth and ambience that it wouldn't have with a single light source. In the kitchen, there are lights above and below the cabinets, as well as recessed cans that light the walnut cabinet fronts. Cove lights in the bedroom and TV room are used for ambient light.

#### Furniture on wheels:

Pieces with casters can be moved easily, depending on how the space is being used.

#### Bright walls, big room:

Painting one wall of a room a vibrant color provides a visual jolt without overwhelming a small space.

#### Customize storage as much as possible:

A broom closet may actually be a waste of space. Hart and Wright built custom cabinets to hold many of their possessions, but off-the-shelf solutions are also available.

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