



Kaleidoscope cabin

In the woods of Northern California, an intoxicating mix of elements—vintage goods, global treasures, and natural found objects—creates a home as rich and colorful as a magic carpet ride

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PROP STYLING BY SHEHERAZADE ARASNIA

A vintage stove (with a griddle perfect for breakfast crêpes), 1950s turquoise-hued dinnerware, and layers of exotic rugs form a dazzling tableau in the cabin's main living space.

Pieces of home

Putting together a dream retreat



Standing-seam metal roofing and salvaged cedar siding give the exterior a rugged look. **RIGHT** A balcony overlooks the central living space. **BELOW** A bank of windows wraps around the master bedroom.

The background

Mario Kashou and Gaétan Caron refer to their property simply as “the land.” Up a steep and winding road in the hills of California’s Mendocino County, the old apple and pear orchard was originally settled by 19th-century Portuguese immigrants. After years of camping on the 105-acre site they purchased in 1999, Kashou and Caron decided to build a house that drew from a diverse patchwork of influences and inspirations. “I’ve always preferred the old to the new,” says Caron, cofounder of San Francisco’s Lost Art Salon. “And we were both so in love with the land that we knew whatever we built would have to respect its beauty.” With the help of Berkeley’s Arkin Tilt Architects, the couple devised a plan for an off-the-grid, straw bale-insulated, 1,450-square-foot retreat that feels both cutting-edge and timeless.



The design

The hub of the house is the living/dining area and kitchen, which Caron describes as a kind of “sheltered courtyard.” Interior windows and a balcony look down on the action; two bedrooms flank a stairway that “looks a little like an alley in an old village in Turkey or Greece,” Caron says.

Global travels informed much of the home’s aesthetic. “We were inspired by the houses in the mountains of Morocco, which are made out of clay to keep warm in the winter and cool in the summer,” Caron says. This green-building technique, known as pisé, transformed soil from the property into an earthen material for the walls. Kashou and Caron spent weekends for a couple of months helping the construction crew sift dirt; the natural reddish orange hue of the walls comes from the mineral-rich clay.



The mood

Coziness and conviviality radiate from every room, thanks to the rich, warm color of the clay walls and the unmistakable patina of salvaged wood. It’s a house built for long weekends with friends, casual dinner parties, and nights huddled by the Rais wood-burning stove sharing a bottle of wine. “We really wanted it to feel communal,” Caron says.

Kashou and Caron’s other goal was to fill the house with simple, meaningful decor in keeping with their values. “Everything here comes from a thrift shop,” laughs Kashou, a statement that’s not far from the truth. Found objects from the woods of Mendocino meet secondhand pieces from San Francisco’s Mission District and lavishly patterned rugs from far-flung places such as Iran, Morocco, and Turkey. Even the redwood used for kitchen shelves and a daybed has a provenance (the planks, some bearing nativity scenes, were salvaged from a church). “All these little elements add up to make the house feel like it’s been here forever,” Caron says.



The simple and serene bathroom looks out on a mulberry grove. **TOP ROW** A fallen manzanita branch was made into a coatrack by Caron; the window nook is a frequent gathering spot.

How to buy vintage

Sources and secrets to scoring the best secondhand goods

As flea-market and eBay aficionados know, nothing beats the thrill of a secondhand find. But buying vintage is not always cheaper than buying new. In the case of salvaged materials, the initial cost may be lower, but the construction process is often more labor-intensive. Before purchasing salvaged materials, talk to your contractor or carpenter and assess the scope of the work. As for vintage accessories and decor, it's simply a matter of developing an eye for hidden gems.

1 SALVAGED WOOD

Mario Kashou and Gaéton Caron found most of their wood at **Whole House Building Supply & Salvage** in East Palo Alto, California (driftwoodsalvage.com or 650/328-8731). "You can't predict what you'll find—for us, it was a big batch of beautiful old cedar," Caron says. He recommends buying 20 percent more than you think you need, to compensate for broken pieces or remilling. And if you find a particularly good batch, consider buying the whole supply. "It'll come in handy for future projects, and you can get a better deal if you buy more."

2 SALVAGED WINDOWS

The set pictured here came from **Urban Ore** in Berkeley (urbanore.com, yppguides.net or 510/841-7283). "I love old glass like this because you can see its thickness and texture," Caron says.

3 COOKING UTENSILS

Kashou amassed this collection of copper pots and pans on repeated visits to thrift stores in

San Francisco's Mission District, especially **Thrift Town** (thrifttown.com or 415/861-1132). He paid about \$15 for each item. Pyrex dishes and cookware in typical 1950s colors—mustard yellow, apple green, bright turquoise—are often prized by collectors and are easy to spot on thrift-shop shelves.

4 CANDLES AND CANDLESTICKS

The beeswax candles are from **Laughing Candles** in Santa Cruz, California (laughingcandles.com or 831/454-9088). "Natural beeswax doesn't smoke, and the smell is amazing," Caron says. The brass candlesticks, found at flea markets and thrift stores, enhance the candles' warm glow.

5 SALVAGED TOWEL RACK

Caron found this old iron headboard—a souvenir from the land's Portuguese-settler days—half-buried in a ravine and almost entirely rusted over. He used a metal brush to remove the rust, sealed it with linseed oil, and had it installed in the bathroom.



The landscape

Framed by madrone posts, the front porch overlooks the orchard that Kashou is lovingly restoring. Along with pears and apples, the bounty now includes cherries, apricots, plums, peaches, and persimmons; a string of gentle-natured wild ponies often wanders through to graze on the fallen fruit. "Working on the land is my way of losing myself to something greater," Kashou says. As Caron explains, "If the orchard weren't here, the house wouldn't be here—and most likely neither would we."

DESIGN Anni Tilt, Arkin Tilt Architects, Berkeley (arkintilt.com or 510/528-9830) ■

