

# california

HOME+DESIGN

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Neal Schwartz created a wall of glass patterned with a blown-up image of DNA to showcase the unusual collection of homeowner Bart Sheperd, who is the head curator of the Steinhart Aquarium at the California Academy of Sciences.



# THE GLASS MENAGERIE



A collector of curiosities and his family renovate their home in Eureka Valley to add life, light and room to grow.

BY ERIN FEHER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN





Glimpses of Bart's specimen wall are visible from the adjacent family room—a casual space that Schwartz was able to add to the main floor by arranging rooms along an open hallway (below).

A year ago, Bart Sheperd—the head curator of the Steinhart Aquarium at the California Academy of Sciences—was relocating sea urchins, abalone and giant octopuses from their temporary home on San Francisco's Mission Street to the brand new California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. At the same time, he was also packing up tricycles, kitchen wares and furniture in order to move his family—wife Kathy and young daughters Charlotte and Cecelia—into their newly remodeled Eureka Valley home.

Kathy and Bart enlisted architect Neal Schwartz of Schwartz and Architecture to turn their dim 2,200-square-foot, two-story Edwardian cottage into a light and airy modern home appropriate for their young family. "It was obvious that someone had done some bad things to that house," says Schwartz, referring to the jumbled and awkward floor plan, which had a full bath wedged next to the kitchen. "When

I first saw the house, I worried that we'd spend the whole budget just fixing old mistakes. But with a few small moves we were able to really straighten out the space."

In addition to an improved flow, the Sheperds also wanted a design that would be an expression of their personalities. For Bart, that meant incorporating his various collections—including more than 300 specimens displayed in glass jars—into the home's decor without making it feel like a spooky scientific laboratory. Schwartz recalls his first encounter with Bart's study, which had walls lined with sea horses, pipefish and sea sponges. "When I discovered this hidden place containing all these amazing things, I knew I wanted to make it the heart of the house somehow while still keeping it his own secluded space," says Schwartz.

High on the Sheperds' wish list was a family room where the kids could play and the family could watch movies and hang out together. With three bedrooms and two baths making up the





second floor, the modest entry level had to be reconfigured in order to contain everything else—living and dining rooms, kitchen, Bart’s study and a guest bath. In the early stages of the design, it looked as if the Sheperds’ dream family room would be relegated to the basement alongside the garage. But as Schwartz began swapping rooms around, shifting walls and streamlining the staircase, he found himself with a room to spare. “We were so happy when Neal said he could fit the family room on the main floor—it’s so much easier to keep an eye on the kids when they are right there,” says Bart.

From the beginning, Schwartz wanted to connect the rooms using glass walls and floor-to-ceiling sliding panels that would allow light to penetrate the center of the narrow floor plan while still offering privacy. An enclosed staircase, imposingly located between the entryway and living room, was replaced with a frosted-glass stairwell. A new hallway leads from the entrance to the back of the house, where generous windows in the redesigned kitchen look out onto the terrace and

RIGHT: Sliding glass doors in the kitchen connect the indoors with out and bring light to the entire first floor.  
BELOW: Bamboo was used for the cabinets; the backsplash of green horizontal tiles references the etched glass pattern.



*“I wanted to highlight the overlap of spaces, and visually connect the study with the family room.”*



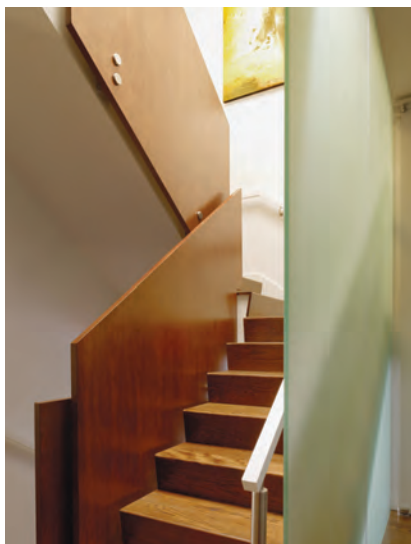


A dark, enclosed staircase was replaced with a modern stairwell walled with frosted glass, a material that reappears on the exterior. "Now when people enter the front door the view doesn't stop, it continues to the back of the house," says Schwartz.

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backyard. Just beyond the new staircase, a dining area peeks into the kitchen via a cutout in the wall, and a frosted-glass side door leads into a narrow, Zen-like light well.

Schwartz placed Bart's study across the hall from the glass stairwell, adjacent to what would become the new family room. "I wanted to highlight the overlap of spaces, and visually connect the study with the family room," says Schwartz, who created a more public display for Bart's collection to capture that feeling of awe he felt when he first saw it. The architect envisioned an etched-glass dividing wall with opaque and transparent sections that allow glimpses, shadows and silhouettes of the specimen jars to be seen from the family room. Experimenting with patterns in the glass, Schwartz was reminded of images he'd seen of scientific reproductions of DNA strands. He found one such image online, and made a mock-up of glass etched with his own stylized interpretation to show the family. "As soon as he explained the concept to me, I was all in," says Bart.

However, the design ended up needing one small tweak. "I realized the DNA strand I used in the mock-up was something horrible, like salmonella," says Schwartz, who decided that the DNA of a harbor seal was far more appropriate. The Shperds loved the patterned and frosted glass so much that Schwartz extended the frosted glass to the exterior as well. They hadn't intended to change the house's facade at all, but the discovery of dry rot above the garage necessitated significant changes to the stairway leading to the front door from the sidewalk. "It allowed us to move things around and make the procession to the front door more gracious while also giving a hint that something more modern was happening," says Schwartz. The decks at both the front and the rear of the house have frosted-glass partitions;

ABOVE: Taking cues from the interior, the back patio features clean lines, dark wood and frosted glass. RIGHT: Kathy, Charlotte, Cecelia and Bart kick back in the foyer, the first in a progression of living areas leading to the backyard.



the same panels decorate the rear exterior wall, contrasting with the home's traditional Edwardian architecture and setting the stage for the planned addition of a greenhouse where Bart can display his plant collection.

"We are so happy with how it turned out," says Bart. "From the indoor/outdoor spaces to the kid-friendly kitchen and family room, the home is really custom-fit to our lifestyle." ■

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