

Step Inside an Atherton Family Home That Welcomes the Outdoors In

Ohara Davies-Gaetano and Ken Linsteadt Architects deftly synthesize their clients' passions into a property

By [Jessica Ritz](#)

Photography by [Sam Frost](#)

September 11, 2023



In Silicon Valley, where the cultural thrust is in relentless search of the new, a recently completed home tells a refreshingly different story. Setting the tone for this nontypical project was a brief that centered around a beloved space: “The most important room to everyone in the family was the two-story library,” interior designer Ohara Davies-Gaetano of [ODG Interiors](#) says of the Atherton home. “That’s what got them all so incredibly excited about the project.”

The clients’ personal backgrounds informed the stylistic approach and program for the home that began as a ground-up design by [Ken Linsteadt Architects](#). Homeowner Thomas Kurian is a technology executive who is originally from India, and Allison Kurian is an oncologist and professor at Stanford University who grew up in New England. “We wanted to make sure the property evoked certain things and memories for us,” recalls Thomas. Conversations with Davies-Gaetano, Linsteadt, and landscape designer Janell Denler Hobart of [Denler Hobart Gardens](#) quickly translated into “a common sense of aesthetics early on,” he adds.

The Kurians outlined three key organizing principles and objectives for what they wanted to achieve in replacing the previous low-slung California Ranch–style structure on the site. Firstly, they wanted to enjoy a seamless indoor-outdoor connection among all the rooms and spaces. Secondly, they admired the Cape Dutch–style homes they’d seen in South Africa that suggest “the notion of a farmhouse,” which would also be a subtle nod to Allison’s northeastern roots. And finally, the designers were tasked with devising a fresh interpretation of the courtyard-oriented buildings that Thomas fondly remembered from India.

Linsteadt responded by designing a scheme that contains three distinct wings and pavilions to form a semi-enclosed courtyard with an elongated tiled fountain as the focal point. This approximately 7,000-square-foot residence leaves room to breathe and sits gently on its site. On the primary elevation, the Cape Dutch–inspired parapeted gables, in tandem with a stucco-and-slate exterior material palette, “feel traditional and modern at the same time,” Linsteadt says. “It treads the line really well.”

Throughout the interiors, Davies-Gaetano continues this nuanced synthesis of multiple references, thoughtfully creating resonant gestures that “pay respect to their heritage.” A series of wall panels in the primary bedroom depicting a tree-of-life motif was custom screen-printed and embroidered in India by [D’Ascoli](#). The ornate imagery “anchors the room” and is also a beautiful tribute to India. Other furnishings and accessories enhance this particular design narrative. “They were really passionate about ideas like that,” Davies-Gaetano says.

The home’s key focal point, the richly appointed library, reflects the family’s love of multidisciplinary intellectual pursuits. Other spaces in the house are primed for gathering and living without preciousness or pretense. During the design process, Davies-Gaetano wanted to strike “that balance between having a house that’s elevated but has a relaxed feeling, so that any room can be used at any point in time,” she observes—whether it’s the formal dining room embellished with bespoke molding details and a compelling juxtaposition of antiques, or the casual pool house that’s ideally suited for teenage socializing.

While most of the furnishings are new, the Kurians selected a few key pieces of artwork and books from their previous home that they wanted to incorporate. They otherwise wholeheartedly put their faith in Davies-Gaetano’s sensibility and “embraced the opportunity to mix in antiques as well as vintage pieces, which to me creates soul—especially in a home that’s new,” the designer notes. The powder room illustrates this eclectic yet studied philosophy. The compact space is coated with a lime-wash plaster in a shade Davies-Gaetano describes as “an inky eucalyptus green.” These surfaces serve as a backdrop to a pair of circa-1960 brass sconces that the designer purchased in Paris, a gilded 18th-century Rococo mirror, and a hand-chipped mosaic-tile floor crafted in France.

In the end, it’s no wonder that a spirit of deep listening, cooperation, openness, and creative partnership shines through in this home. “There was this huge level of trust for Ken’s team and our team to collaborate and come to them with design opportunities,” Davies-Gaetano says. “It was a beautiful, poetic relationship.”



[Ken Linstead Architects](#) and Ohara Davies-Gaetano of [ODG Interiors](#) worked together to bring Thomas and Allison Kurian’s personal histories and interests into a ground-up 7,000-square-foot home in Atherton, California. On the primary elevation, Cape Dutch–inspired parapeted gables and the stucco-and-slate exterior material palette “feel traditional and modern at the same time,” Linstead observes. “It treads the line really well.” The Baillie Pendant Lantern is by [Jamb](#).



Landscape designer Janell Denler Hobart of [Denler Hobart Gardens](#), who frequently collaborates with Linstead, emphasizes that “the most important thing is that the indoors and outdoors are seamless.” Thomas observes that incorporating the existing mature palm, oak, and magnolia trees on the property was not a limiting constraint, but rather became “one of the best things that happened.” Denler Hobart created a rill water feature that punctuates the entrance to the residence and terminates in an oak tree.

“They wanted color in the home, but Ken and I collectively felt that color needed to be done in such a way where it wasn’t overpowering—and tied in with the gardens,” Davies-Gaetano explains. In the living room, where a pair of [Dmitriy & Co.](#) Belgard sofas welcome guests, she selected an 18th-century Belgian marble fireplace, above which artist [James Kendall Higgins’s](#) *La Jolla Fields* piece is mounted and flanked by vintage Anglo-Indian opaline glass sconces from [Carlos de la Puente Antiques](#). The delicate [Flora Ottilia](#) chandelier is from [Déliurge New York](#). Teal wool drapery from [Carleton V](#) introduces more color and relates to the exterior environment, while Jasper Side Tables by [Elan Atelier](#) and ottomans upholstered in [Zak + Fox’s Cimaruta](#) add pattern and intrigue. ODG Interiors custom-designed the book cases, cocktail table, and wing lounge chair.



“I love a curated interior that melds genres and styles from different perspectives and different regions around the world,” Davies-Gaetano says. “I mix everything.” The dining room reflects this approach with custom molding and ceiling flourishes; a polished-bronze Mask Chandelier from Cox London; a French Accents rug; a custom walnut dining table; and Harris Dining Chairs by Quintus, upholstered in Carleton V’s Whitewell fabric in Lake Blue. These items coexist with antiques, such as a Louis XV terra-cotta urn (placed on a commode made in Alsace during the late 18th century) and a circa-1880 French tapestry from Lavender Oriental Carpets. There’s also a pedestal plaster piece by artist Kirsten Perry, vintage candlesticks from Nickey Kehoe, and smaller sculptural accessories found at Coup D’Etat. Davies-Gaetano designed a pedestal in light oak to hold a midcentury abstract marble sculpture in the window, also sourced from Coup D’Etat.



Davies-Gaetano added subtle chromatic interplay in the kitchen, painting the island in Anchor Gray and the perimeter cabinetry in Mineral Alloy—both colors by [Benjamin Moore](#). The lights above the island are [Hector Finch’s](#) Tiber Pendants, and the Apollo Counter Stools from [Carlyle Collective](#) are covered in [de Le Cuona](#) linen. The smoke-white zellige tile from [Da Vinci Marble](#) on the backsplash is a quiet foil to the Sully Cooking Range from [Lacanche](#). Custom enamel drawers and Lacanche brass drawer-pulls match the range.





The dining nook by the kitchen window further welcomes the outdoors in. The Utah ceiling fixture from [Gallery L7](#) has a vintage feel and complements the warm brown tones in ODG Interiors' walnut oval dining table, the fabrics by Carleton V and the Perennials' Plushy fabric in Paper Bag that upholster the banquette cushions, as well as the set of [Netherlandish](#) dining chairs by [Démiurge New York](#).



Davies-Gaetano identifies the two-story library as the room that got the clients “so incredibly excited about the project.” Thomas notes that it’s Allison’s favorite feature of the home. “It’s a remarkable room and an amazing place to just sit and read or work.” A 19th-century French Empire mahogany daybed anchors the soaring window vignette, juxtaposed with a hex glazed-ceramic side table in the color Chrome Green by [Bzippy](#) and a circa-1780 Rococo chair from Sweden. The wall sconces were custom-made by ODG Interiors.



The powder room is swathed with a lime-wash plaster in a shade that Davies-Gaetano describes as “an inky eucalyptus green” and that is based on [Farrow & Ball’s Green Smoke](#). The circa-1960 brass sconces are a vintage find from Paris that makes for an eclectic yet studied grouping, with a gilded carved-wood frame Rococo mirror and the hand-chipped mosaic tile floor that layers more texture.



Architect Linsteadt describes the corridor, clad with a black-and-white checkered stone floor, as “the center spine in the house.” The passageway leads to the private bedroom wing on one side and the kitchen and family space on the other, and it runs parallel to the living room. A picture showcases one of three outdoor pieces by sculptor [David Harber](#). The alabaster pendants are from [Chameleon Fine Lighting](#), and the sconce is [Corbin Bronze’s Cascara](#). Most of the shared spaces in the house are painted in [White Dove by Benjamin Moore](#).



A [Tai Ping](#) runner covers the steps in the restrained and elegant staircase, which Davies-Gaetano says “was a collaboration between Ken’s team and our team. We both agreed that it should be a simple metal picket.” Louise travertine sconces designed by Michel Amar and made by La Fonderie Chapon, which ODG Interiors sourced via [Les Ateliers Courbet](#), provide a sculptural element. A [Bzippy](#) vase stands atop an antique Swedish table from the 19th century.



The primary bedroom “pays tribute to Indian heritage,” most strikingly through the tree-of-life motif screen-printed and embroidered wall panel series that Davies-Gaetano commissioned through [D’Ascoli](#). Rich textures and patterns are further expressed through mother-of-pearl inlay nightstands from Syria, a custom plaster chandelier, and a nature-inspired brass canopy bed frame that the Kurians previously owned.



The pool house is largely the domain of the Kurians' teenage son. A custom sectional upholstered with [Kerry Joyce Textiles' Colette](#) collection and the Pierre Augustin Nesting Duo Tables from [Garde](#) makes for a comfortable and casual haven. The sconce is by [Allied Maker](#), the throw pillows are from [Jenni Kayne](#), and the fabrics are from [Rosemary Hallgarten](#) and [Misia Paris](#).



This veranda space connected to the family room can be enclosed with curtains or remain open to the pool area and yard.



The link between indoor and outdoor continues in the dining pavilion tucked between the primary courtyard and pool. The chandelier lantern is custom-made by OGD Interiors, as is the Belgian bluestone-marble dining table. Chairs are from [Janus et Cie's Amalfi collection](#) in [Ishi by Perennials](#). [ODG Galerie](#) sourced the vintage midcentury concrete planter.



The layout of the house focuses on the symmetrical central courtyard with a tiled fountain that evokes Thomas's associations of the typology in India, along with the aforementioned Persian and Moroccan influences. The custom platform daybed is by ODG Interiors, with [Sunbrella](#) seat back and cushions and accent pillows in fabrics from [Peter Dunham Textiles](#), [Pierre Frey](#) and [Scalamandré](#). The sconces are custom by ODG Interiors, and the side tables are by [Draga & Aurel](#) for [Baxter](#).



Linsteadt's plan establishes three wings that form a central courtyard with an axial view to the pool, as well as multiple pavilions. [Janus et Cie Amalfi](#) chaise longues upholstered in [Perennials](#) fabrics and vintage French arm chairs make for a relaxed setting. [Denler Hobart's](#) plant palette includes a continuously rotating array of blooming color and fragrance.

